

Criticism & Censorship

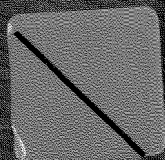
from regulation to representation

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SCREEN

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INTRODUCTION

On January 24, as this special issue on censorship was at its final editing stage, a new bill to amend the 1959 Obscene Publications Act was debated in Parliament. The 1959 Act is one of Britain's central statutes for the regulation of representation. Introduced by the then Labour (now Social Democrat) MP Roy Jenkins to protect 'serious literature' from prosecution under anti-obscenity legislation dating from 1857, it incorporated the famous 'deprave and corrupt' test first advanced by Lord Chief Justice Cockburn in 1868, but insisted that any published work must be judged as a whole, and allowed for a 'public good' defence on the grounds of scientific, artistic or 'general concern'.

As part of the post-Wolfenden wave of liberal reform, the '59 Act was implicated in the ethico-geographical distinction that Report¹ drew between a public sphere in which greater regulation was required to protect non-consenting citizens from offence (from solicitation by homosexuals or prostitutes, indecent displays, etc) and a private sphere in which consenting adults were entitled to make (im)moral choices (actual acts of homosexuality and prostitution, the use of pornography, etc). Children, defined as incapable of granting consent, were automatically assigned to the public sphere. But women, as Annette Kuhn has pointed out, 'prove quite difficult to fit into this model.... Within legal discourse, women occupy a constantly shifting position, in terms of vulnerability, need for protection and also of civil rights, between the poles of childhood and adulthood, consent and its absence, regulation and non-regulation, public and private.'²

Succeeding decades have shown this liberal distinction a difficult one to maintain – particularly in Great Britain, whose various legal systems recognise no equivalent to the transcendent right of 'free speech' inscribed in the First Amendment to the US Constitution. Neither feminists nor New Right campaigners like Mary Whitehouse's National Viewers and Listeners Association regard 'the home' as a domain properly exempt from political jurisdiction, although many – but not all – British feminists are distrustful of State regulation in matters of representation, particularly under a Tory government. (A recent London women's meeting convened by the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom forecast feminist pressure on the next Labour administration for an anti-defamation law like those recently passed, and then

repealed, in France and some US cities.)

Furthermore, changes in both exhibition patterns and technology have transformed the home into the major outlet for 'mass' media in Britain, producing simultaneous demands for 'serious, adult' programming and the 'protection' of children. The latter consideration surfaced in the recently successful agitation for the 1984 Video Recordings Act, on behalf of under-18s argued to have been 'exposed' to sex and horror films acquired by parents, older siblings, friends or themselves from indiscriminate suppliers.

But even before these changes, television could be seen to present a *prima facie* challenge to the Wolfenden dichotomy, given its peculiar combination of public transmission and private consumption and the supposed immediacy and transparency of the image. Thus Conservative MP Virginia Bottomley in the January 24 debate:

the great difference between television as a medium of communication and, for example, page 3 of The Sun [is that] television comes into people's sitting rooms and, as such, is acceptable to children from an early age.³

And Conservative MP Nicholas Fairbairn:

there is a great difference between visual experience and the experience of reading or hearing. Visual experience requires no intellectual effort to absorb, translate, comprehend or interpret.... As a Scotsman I regret that it was a Scot who invented both television and the telephone, which are the only two intrusions into private houses that anybody can make without permission.⁴

As a possible source of unavoidable offence, the unbidden guest in the home, television turns the private space of consensual consumption into an area which demands, in the words of the Broadcasting Act, regulation on behalf of 'public decency or good taste'. The sitting room becomes, for legisla-

¹ *Report of the Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution* (Chairman: Lord Wolfenden), Cmnd 257, London, Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1957.

² Annette Kuhn, 'Public versus Private: the Case of Indecency and Obscenity', *Leisure Studies* 3 (1984), p. 64. (See also, Annette Kuhn, 'Covering Up Sex', *New Statesman*, January 24, 1984, pp. 10-11; and Beverley Brown, 'Private Faces in Public Places', *Ideology and Consciousness* 7, pp. 3-16.

³ *Parliamentary Debates (Hansard)*, January 24, 1986, London, Her Majesty's Stationery Office, p. 570.

⁴ *ibid*, p. 588.

tive purposes, identical to the street, and the home audience equated with unwary passers-by—of whom the most unwary are those pre-eminently non-consenting subjects, children. (In their redefined role as public places, all domestic sites are assumed to include children.)

As social and political change has challenged the discursive distinction between the spheres of public and private, so too has the recent regulation of representations. With the 1982 Cinematograph (Amendment) Act, no UK premises for the commercial exhibition of film or video could escape licensing on the grounds that the audience were members of a private club. And in the same year the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act required the licensing of all sex shops and cinemas and—for the first time in UK anti-obscenity legislation—drew up, in its definition of ‘sex cinema’, a list of restricted representations in ‘moving pictures’:

a) concerned primarily with the portrayal of, or primarily deal with or relate to, or are intended to stimulate or encourage—

(i) sexual activity; or

(ii) acts of force or restraint which are sexual activity; or

b) are concerned primarily with the portrayal of, or primarily deal with or relate to, genital organs or urinary or excretory functions.

Two years later, the Video Recordings Act extended this list of *a priori* restrictions to include the depiction of ‘acts of gross violence towards humans or animals’.

The current bill to amend the Obscene Publications Act is a formidable extrapolation of the trend to regulate representations of particular acts or parts of the body. Where the 1959 Act permits juries to judge an article on the basis of its moral effect with a view towards mitigating aesthetic or scientific concerns, the Amendment bill would deem automatically ‘obscene’ any representation broadcast on television or published in a place to which under-18s have access which

depicts visually, and in actual or simulated form, acts of masturbation, sodomy, oral/genital connection, oral/anal connection, the lewd exhibition of genital organs or excretory functions, cannibalism, bestiality, mutilation or vicious cruelty towards persons or animals.

(As one of the bill’s proponents, Tory MP Douglas

Hogg, pointed out, the framing of such a list to supplement the deprave and corrupt test constitutes an admission that ‘a causal connection between violence on television and the commission of violent offences... has not been certainly established. [However] society is entitled to say that certain matters are so offensive that they should not be published, even if we cannot establish that they have a prejudicial effect.’⁵)

The consequences of this list, as barrister Geoffrey Robertson recently argued⁶, would be to banish Grecian urns (‘sodomy’), sex manuals (‘oral-genital connection’) and documentaries on German concentration camps (‘vicious cruelty’) to licensed porn shops (presumably hung with proscribed images of the crucifixion and religious martyrdoms removed from British churches and museums). These are not, however, the intentions of the bill’s sponsors (though it would be unwise to underestimate the iconoclasm of Mrs Whitehouse). Both Conservative MPs Winston Churchill Jr and Sir Nicholas Bonsor insist that their bill, prompted in part by Channel 4’s recent screening of Derek Jarman’s *Sebastiane*, is largely designed to ban ‘explicit homosexual acts’ from public exhibition.⁷ As Labour MP Jo Richardson readily agreed in the debate on January 24, it seems ‘almost obsessive’ in its ‘many references to the anus’ and ‘can be seen as a thinly-disguised attack on any visual depiction of a homosexual relationship’.⁸

It is not then surprising that the BBC, fearful of the government’s inclination to both deregulate the financing of mass media and increase Parliamentary control over their output, responded to the tenor of this bill by voluntarily withdrawing a January *Horizon* programme on AIDS and the sexual practices of gay men. Although the sensationalism and sheer ignorance of this programme would have been an unwelcome addition to the queer-bashing coverage of the subject (and a gross violation of the factual reporting requirements in its Charter), these are not the likeliest reasons for its withdrawal. Not in a year which has seen the Corporation withdraw *At the Edge of the Union* at

⁵ *ibid*, p 580.

⁶ Geoffrey Robertson, ‘A Laundry List Approach to Obscenity’, the *Guardian*, February 10, 1986.

⁷ See Joan Smith, ‘Mrs Mary Whitehouse’s Private Member’, *New Statesman* December 13, 1985, p 10-11.

⁸ *Parliamentary Debates (Hansard)*, op cit, p 594.

4 the direct request of the Home Secretary, cancel a *Brass Tacks* report on police corruption, and only under extreme pressure admit that many of its staff are formally vetted by British intelligence.

It is in the light of such developments that *Screen* returns to the subject of censorship. This issue includes a dossier of short accounts of such institutional practices, many of them written by contributors directly involved as producers, programmers or campaigners in the relevant fields. But, as video-maker Jon Dovey reminds us, censorship is not a single transitive act. The contributions to this issue reconsider its object (text or context, as Annette Kuhn asks of the 1923 regulation of *Married Love?*); its subject (the audience imagined by censorship, whose role Richard Maltby compares to that of criticism); and its very operation – the repression of meanings, or – in the Foucauldian ana-

lysis employed by Kuhn – their production?

A similar approach to Mr Churchill's 'Obscene Publications (Protection of Children, Etc.) (Amendment) Bill' might yield more useful responses than the filth vs art debate conducted on January 24 – which left the bill's sponsors promising to cobble together aesthetic exemptions for *King Lear* and its opponents, in the person of Labour Arts spokesman Norman Buchan, vainly attempting to shift the blame to the old bogeys of 'desensitising' horror comics and 'the careless violence of the American pulp serials'. The subsequent division gave the bill its second reading by 161 to 31, with the Ayes including the Prime Minister. Unless the regulation of representation, and indeed the representation of regulation, are rapidly reconsidered, it could be enacted by summer.

MANDY MERCK

THE 'MARRIED LOVE' AFFAIR

BY ANNETTE KUHN

I

IN THE SUMMER of 1923, a British film titled *Maisie's Marriage* (co-written by Marie Stopes and directed by Walter Summers) became the target of a number of attempts at censorship. Institutional practices of film censorship are always obliged to assume as their object individual films—texts, representations with specific boundaries: and yet in any actual instance of censorship there is usually more than this at stake. Certainly in the case of *Maisie's Marriage*, the content of the film does not alone provide sufficient explanation either for the excessive efforts at censorship directed at it, nor for the consequences of those efforts, many of which were unforeseeable and some indeed the very opposite of what had been intended.

Maisie's Marriage became an object of censorship by virtue of its implication, at a particular historical moment, within a certain set of discourses and power relations, which penetrate the text and yet also exceed it. These include discourses and practices of film censorship, but also involved in the constitution of *Maisie's Marriage* as censorable are the operations on the one hand of the film industry and on the other of contemporary debates around sexuality and birth control. Each of these—censorship, the film industry, discourses on sexuality—constructs the film differently, and each is caught up in a struggle over the conditions under which the film was to enter the public domain. Each, too, inscribes different interests and power relations, some of them operating in contradiction.

The routine procedures of censorship at the time the film was released were instrumental in determining the limits of what was and what was not 'suitable' material for commercial cinema screens. Although in this respect *Maisie's Marriage* could not be faulted either in content or in style, the film's connection with the name of Marie Stopes made it extremely troublesome, all the more so because there was very little in the film itself that could seriously be objected to: while the film was produced as an object of censorship through its engagement with contemporary debates around sexuality and birth control, these issues are not explicitly articulated within it. This made it a peculiarly elusive object of censorship. One of the difficulties *Maisie's Marriage* posed *vis-à-vis* film

censorship was that it was already a product of other contemporary censorships, notably of the widespread taboo on discussing sexual matters and the virtual impossibility of obtaining information on birth control.

Nevertheless, although the film is open to a variety of readings, meanings in *Maisie's Marriage* became relatively fixed in the moment of censorship, through which it was precisely constructed as 'controversial'. Film censorship creates censorable films: and a censorable film, once it has entered the public domain, becomes a marketable property exactly because of the lure of prohibition conferred by acts of censorship. The *Maisie's Marriage* affair offers one instance of censorship operating not only prohibitively in the regulation of the public sphere of cinema, but also productively in the actual creation of such a sphere.

II

Maisie Burrows, the eldest of ten children, meets and falls in love with Dick Reading, a fireman. When Dick proposes marriage, Maisie refuses him because she does not want a life like that of her parents, who have too many children and not enough money. Turned out of home by her father after a family row, Maisie wanders the streets in desperation, eventually attempting suicide by jumping off a bridge. She is rescued, but immediately arrested and sent to jail for two months. On her release, Maisie is taken in as a maidservant by her rescuer's wife, Mrs Sterling. The Sterlings have three children and a happy marriage, and from Mrs Sterling Maisie learns that she can enjoy married love without the consequences she so fears. One evening, when Maisie is alone in the house with the Sterling children, her degenerate brother calls and extorts money. In the ensuing fracas, the house catches fire and Maisie is rescued by Dick. The couple, joyously reunited, marry.

This, in brief, is the story of *Maisie's Marriage*, made and released in 1923. Besides being a love story of a kind commonplace enough in the popular cinema of the day, *Maisie's Marriage* also deals, implicitly at least, with birth control and marital happiness, proposing a direct causal link between the two. Such matters were the subject of widespread debate and much controversy in the early 1920s: and 1923 in particular was in a number of respects a key moment of transition in the politics of birth control in Britain.

In the early 1920s, the birth control movement had entered a new phase, and was beginning to secure a broader base for its objectives than it had enjoyed hitherto. One of its new goals was to persuade government and local authorities to sponsor clinics dispensing advice and contraceptives: the first, private, birth control clinics in Britain had opened in 1921. Arguments in favour of birth control began to stress its benefits in terms of the health, welfare and general happiness of mothers and children, a shift from the earlier, predominantly eugenic, emphasis on the quality of the population. The movement was now ready to make a bid for party political support for its aims, or at least for a voice in Parliament. Although no party actually adopted any policy on birth control, a

number of MPs were publicly supportive of the cause. Outside Parliament, the movement was also gaining ground within the Labour Party: the idea of birth control as a public health issue was certainly more attractive to the Left than had been the more characteristically middle-class eugenic approach. It was during this period that a number of Labour-controlled local authorities came into conflict with the government over the question of publicly-funded birth control clinics. At the beginning of 1923, public awareness of all these issues was heightened spectacularly by a handful of *causes célèbres*. A health visitor, Nurse E S Daniels, was suspended and later dismissed from her job for giving advice on birth control to some of her clients. The case aroused a great deal of interest and much support for Nurse Daniels herself. At about the same time, two left-wing birth control activists, Rose Witcop and Guy Aldred, were prosecuted for circulating Margaret Sanger's pamphlet, *Family Limitation*, and found guilty of selling an obscene publication. And finally in February, Marie Stopes, eugenicist, author and well-known birth control campaigner, went to court with a much-publicised libel suit.¹

If the appearance of a film like *Maisie's Marriage* at such a moment constituted a strategic intervention in a broader debate, any relationship between the latter and the former pivots as much on discourses surrounding the film as on the content of the film itself. These include, but are by no means confined to, contemporary preoccupations around sexuality, sexual pleasure and contraception. *Maisie's Marriage* is at once produced by these discourses and productive of meanings of its own, meanings which—in a series of complex and at times contradictory operations—recirculate and transform their originating discourses. The film encounters other practices, too—relations of power through which in specific ways at a particular conjuncture it becomes a cultural product of a certain kind. Predominant among these are practices of what may broadly be termed the cinematic institution, and within these, more specifically, practices of film censorship. Significant in the passage of *Maisie's Marriage* through these practices is the film's association with the name of Marie Stopes. Stopes is credited as writer of the film's story, though the scenario was actually written by her credited co-writer, Walter Summers, with Marie Stopes maintaining the right of final approval of script and control over the content of intertitles.²

In 1923, the name of Marie Stopes was a byword: her book *Married Love* (subtitled 'a new contribution to the solution of sex difficulties') had been an enormous success from its first publication in March 1918. By the end of the year, in fact, it was already in its sixth reprint. In November 1918, in response to demand from readers of *Married Love*, Stopes published another best-seller, *Wise Parenthood*, a short treatise on birth control—of which there had been only a brief discussion in *Married Love*—which included recommendations as to methods of contraception. These successes were followed in 1920 by *Radiant Motherhood*, in part advice manual for first-time parents, in part eugenic tract. Marie Stopes's constituency was at first limited largely to the book-buying

¹ Jeffrey Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society: the Regulation of Sexuality Since 1800*, London, Longman, 1981, chapter 10; Sheila Rowbotham, *Hidden from History*, London, Pluto Press, 1973, p. 150; Jane Lewis, 'The Ideology and Politics of Birth Control in Interwar England', *Women's Studies International Quarterly*, 2 (1979), pp. 33–48; Robert E Dowse and John Peel, 'The Politics of Birth Control', *Political Studies*, 13 (1965), pp. 179–97.

² British Library, Stopes Collection (hereafter BL-SC) ADD 58507, memo of meeting with producers of film, dated April 11, 1923; for biographical information on Stopes, see Ruth Hall, *Marie Stopes: a Biography*, London, Andre Deutsch, 1977.

public—to the middle classes, that is—though within a few years her ideas did begin to achieve much wider circulation.

Marie Stopes's growing fame was perhaps due as much to her notoriety—her books were looked on in some influential quarters as nothing less than scandalous, even obscene, and in certain countries they were even banned—as to the social needs evidently addressed by her work. Her writings certainly provoked huge public response, much of which revealed hitherto untapped depths of ignorance, fear, sexual frustration and conjugal misery.³ At the same time, since they could lay claim to a certain scientific respectability and were endorsed by various eminent medical practitioners, Stopes's ideas could not be dismissed entirely as the outpourings of a crank. The combination of scientificity with sexual subject matter, moral conservatism and romantic appeal guaranteed extensive publicity and a degree of acceptability—as well as controversy—for her work.⁴

In 1923, Marie Stopes's public profile was raised several notches when the trial opened in February of a libel suit she had brought against a Catholic doctor, Halliday Sutherland, who had made some uncomplimentary remarks about contraception in general and Marie Stopes in particular in one of his books. During the nine-day trial, other issues were raised, notably the alleged obscenity of *Married Love*. The trial attracted a great deal of publicity, and was reported in all the popular newspapers. On an unclear jury decision, the judge finally ruled in favour of Sutherland, a verdict which produced further public furore, as well as a good deal of sympathy for the loser. The judgement was taken to appeal, and reversed on July 20. (The verdict did eventually go against Stopes, however: in November 1924, the Lords ruled 4 to 1 in favour of Sutherland.)⁵

During the first half of 1923, then, Stopes and her books were much in the public eye. Controversy raged and sales boomed throughout the year: of *Married Love* alone the number of copies sold virtually doubled (from 241,000 to 406,000) between March and December.⁶ In the period between the February verdict and the July appeal in the Sutherland case, Stopes made her first—and, as it turned out, her last—foray into cinema as a vehicle for her ideas. *Maisie's Marriage* was produced by Samuelson's, a British company with a reputation for quality productions. The film's original title was *Married Love*, but despite its celebration of marital harmony it was in no sense a cinematic version of the book: it made no pretence at being either a scientific treatise or a manual of advice, but was in fact a work of fiction—a 'fast-moving popular melodrama' not very different from the fare on offer at the time in commercial cinemas. Stopes was later to allege that the idea of calling the film *Married Love* had not been hers: be that as it may, its producers were evidently well aware of the publicity value attaching to that particular title. The film was made in just two weeks—in an effort, perhaps, to seize the crest of the Sutherland trial publicity wave. It was trade shown on May 11, and scheduled for a June release.

Married Love was well-received by at least one national newspaper⁷,

³ Ruth Hall (ed), *Dear Dr Stopes: Sex in the 1920s*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1981.

⁴ Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society*, op cit, p 192; Lewis, 'The Ideology and Politics of Birth Control', op cit, pp 35-8.

⁵ Muriel Box (ed), *The Trial of Marie Stopes*, London, Femina Books, 1967; Hall, *Marie Stopes*, op cit, chapter 13.

⁶ Hall, *Marie Stopes*, op cit, p 243; Marie Carmichael Stopes, *Married Love: a New Contribution to the Solution of Sex Difficulties*, 11th edition, London, G P Putnam's Sons Ltd, 1923.

⁷ *Daily Telegraph*, May 14, 1923.

and the film trade was not unsympathetic either – an attitude which was to be modified in light of subsequent events. It was, however, pointed out early on that the title might well generate expectations that the film could not fulfil. One trade reviewer nevertheless concluded that

Whatever may be the suggestion of the title, the film itself is a straightforward human story of sentimental rather than sexual appeal,

while another noted that ‘in spite of its title, the story . . . will appeal to the popular imagination’⁸. But if some critics emphasised the appeal of the story as against the ‘misleading’ character of its title, there was already some unease in the trade about the latter. *Kinematograph Weekly*, a journal which saw itself as representing the more ‘respectable’ elements of the exhibition arm of the film industry, expressed serious misgivings about the choice of title, saying that this was exactly the sort of thing to bring the trade into disrepute.⁹ Exploiting the name of a controversial book was far too crude a piece of gimmickry, it seems, to be tolerated in an industry still aspiring to shed the socially inferior image of a sideshow catering to the most vulgar.

However, before *Married Love* was to find its way into the cinemas of the land, it ran into more formidable obstacles. On the day of its trade show, the film was submitted to the British Board of Film Censors (BBFC), where it languished for more than a month before being released. The Board took exception to the film immediately, on the grounds that

*there are many scenes and sub-titles which render this film in our opinion unsuitable for exhibition before ordinary audiences; while the title, taken in conjunction with the name of the book and the authoress referred to, suggests propaganda on a subject unsuitable for discussion in a Cinema Theatre.*¹⁰

Films based on ‘notorious books’ were to prove repeatedly troublesome to the Board in 1923, and there was a particular dislike of the use of titles of publications that dealt with topics which they regarded as exceeding the proper social function of cinema – namely to entertain.¹¹

The BBFC had evidently seen through the producers’ attempt to capitalise on the publicity value – and the ‘forbidden’ connotations – of the title *Married Love*. But if this title suggested that the film dealt with issues ‘unsuitable’ for the cinema, namely sex and birth control, was there anything in the film which might be regarded as objectionable from the standpoint of British film censors of the early 1920s? The BBFC’s verdict, despite the implication that the film contained objectionable scenes and intertitles, must have been that there was really very little, if anything, in its content that could specifically be objected to. And yet they were most reluctant to grant it a certificate.

In this atmosphere of uncertainty, the BBFC took the unusual step of asking the Home Office for guidance. On May 18, a week after the film was submitted for censorship, officials from the Home Office called at

⁸ *Bioscope*, May 17, 1923, p 61; *Kinematograph Weekly*, May 17, 1923, p 73.

⁹ Leader, *Kinematograph Weekly*, May 17, 1923, p 59.

¹⁰ BL-SC ADD 58507, BBFC to Napoleon Films, May 11, 1923.

¹¹ British Board of Film Censors, *Annual Report 1923*. Other book-based films which ran into censorship trouble at this time include *Three Weeks*, founded on a racy Elinor Glyn novel, and *La Garçonne*, based on a book by French writer Victor Marguerite which was banned in Britain: Public Record Office, Home Office Papers (hereafter PRO-HO) 45/20045; PRO-HO 45/11446.

¹² PRO-HO 45/11382, Home Office memo, dated May 24, 1923.

¹³ BL-SC ADD 58507, Napoleon Films to Marie Stopes (MCS), May 14, 1923; MCS to T P O'Connor, May 15, 1923.

¹⁴ PRO-HO 45/11382, Home Office memo, dated May 24, 1923.

¹⁵ PRO-HO 158/23, The censorship of cinematograph films, circular 373,422/78, July 6, 1923; also PRO-HO 45/11191 and 45/22906.

the Board's premises in Wardour Street to view *Married Love*.¹² In the interim there had been a protest from Marie Stopes to the BBFC President, T P O'Connor (who was a Catholic—a fact which was to figure large in Stopes's assessment of events), and a discussion between O'Connor and the film's producers.¹³ Presumably, no agreement had been reached, and O'Connor told the Home Office that he was inclined to refuse to pass the film. The Home Office representatives, however, took a slightly less negative view about the film's actual content ('there is nothing of an objectionable nature that could not be easily removed by the censor's pruning knife'), though they did agree that there were problems about the title. Their private opinion, nevertheless, was that 'a Birth control-Marie Stopes-propaganda film ought not to appear with a censor's certificate if this could be avoided'¹⁴—an acknowledgement that the trouble was not the actual film but its association with a 'notorious' public figure and a topic that was at once taboo and controversial.

In other circumstances, perhaps, *Married Love* might—with the collusion of the Home Office and the Board of Censors—have been at this point quietly suppressed. But it was not, for several reasons. Because neither the BBFC nor the Home Office possessed any legal powers of film censorship, they could do no more than advise the bodies which did hold such powers, namely the local cinema licensing authorities. Prominent among these was the London County Council, which since the BBFC's inauguration a decade earlier had assumed the role of pacesetter for censorship practices up and down the country. The Board of Censors was eager to maintain good relations with the LCC, which was also represented at the May 18 meeting. However, on the question of *Married Love*, the LCC disagreed with the BBFC, finding it unobjectionable. This difference of opinion provoked anxieties at the Home Office about possible discord between the BBFC and local cinema licensing authorities, or indeed between the various authorities themselves, as to the film's censorability. For if either of these things were to come about, the national uniformity of censorship practices, which the Home Office had been striving for a number of years to attain, would be immediately undermined.

At stake as well was a potential challenge to the BBFC's hitherto rather shaky authority and credibility. After ten years of indecision and struggle, it was hoped within the government that the Board's tenuous legal position was about to achieve at least conventional consolidation, and that local authorities would soon automatically look to it for advice on the censorship and certification of films. To this end, the Home Office was preparing a new set of recommended model conditions for cinema licences: these were to include, for the first time and after some legal tussles, a condition to the effect that no films without the BBFC's certificate were to be exhibited without the express consent of the licensing authority. When the Home Office was called in to give advice on *Married Love*, these new conditions were in the process of being drafted: they ultimately formed the basis of an advisory circular sent to local authorities on July 6.¹⁵ In this delicately-balanced situation, any upset in

¹⁶ PRO-HO 45/11382, Home Office memo dated May 24, 1923.

¹⁷ BL-SC ADD 58507, Brooke Wilkinson to Napoleon Films, May 29, 1923.

relations between any of the parties involved – Home Office, Board of Censors, local authorities – brought on by the *Married Love* affair was to be avoided. ‘I am afraid’, said the government official who reported on the meeting, ‘that the film is bound to cause controversy but it is a pity it has come at a time when we were hoping to secure greater uniformity.’¹⁶

Married Love remained at the BBFC for several weeks while the Censors were trying to come to a decision about it. In response to a protest at the continued delay, the Board wrote to the producers saying the film had been viewed four times and that ‘careful and prolonged consideration’ was still required.¹⁷ But finally on June 7 a list of alterations was agreed between the two parties. After all the delay, the changes demanded by the BBFC were few and on the whole minor in nature, the most significant being that the film’s title should be changed to *Maisie’s Marriage* and that posters and other promotional material were not to say that it was based on Marie Stopes’s book *Married Love*. Apart from this, objection was made to eight intertitles, only one of which was to be deleted: for the rest, amendments only were requested.¹⁸ These changes having been agreed, the BBFC passed the film ‘A’ (for ‘public’ exhibition – recommending exhibition to adults-only audiences). Perhaps as a trade-off for the certificate, the London County Council lent the weight of its support to the BBFC’s demands for changes, and checked a number of attempts within its area to show the film in uncensored form, or to advertise it ‘misleadingly’.¹⁹ The Board expressed the hope that other licensing authorities would be equally vigilant.²⁰

This hope, however, was to prove vain. Within a fortnight of the agreement, it was brought to the BBFC’s attention that the producers of *Maisie’s Marriage* had not in fact made all the changes requested, that uncensored prints of the film were in circulation, and that in many places the name of Marie Stopes was being used in promoting the film in breach of the spirit of the understanding between the Board and the film’s producers. Some exhibitors, it seems, were publicising the film as ‘*Maisie’s Marriage* a story of married love written by Dr Marie Stopes’. Worse still, there were reports that some local authorities had judged the film unobjectionable, and were allowing the uncut version to be exhibited in their areas.²¹ ‘Respectable’ elements of the film trade, having already given their support to the BBFC in the matter of the film’s censorship, expressed their disapproval of certain exhibitors flouting the Censors.²²

These reports were not without foundation. Marie Stopes later conducted an informal survey of local authorities, discovering that a number of them had indeed permitted the exhibition of *Maisie’s Marriage* in uncensored form. She was angry about not having been consulted about changes made to the film, whose distributor afterwards claimed that before it was put into circulation, all of the cuts had in fact been restored.²³ In the version of the film discussed here (see below) some, but certainly not all, of the changes demanded by the BBFC have been made. It seems likely that several different versions of the film were in circulation.

¹⁸ BL-SC ADD 58507, Napoleon Films to MCS, July 2, 1923.

¹⁹ London County Council, Music Hall and Theatres Committee, June 27, 1923; BL-SC ADD 58507, Napoleon Films to MCS, June 20, 1923; LCC to Napoleon Films, July 3, 1923; LCC to various London cinemas, June and July 1923; LCC to MCS, July 16, 1923.

²⁰ PRO-HO 45/11382, Brooke Wilkinson to Home Office, June 27, 1923.

²¹ PRO-HO 45/11382, handwritten Home Office minute, dated June 28, 1923; BL-SC ADD 58507, correspondence between BBFC and Napoleon Films, June 22, 25 and 27, 1923; *Daily Herald*, June 28, 1923.

²² BL-SC ADD 58507, Cinematograph Exhibitors’ Association to MCS, June 6, 1923; *Kinematograph Weekly*, June 7, 1923, p 61; June 21, 1923; p 51.

²³ *Morning Post*, July 11, 1923; BL-SC ADD 58507, correspondence between MCS and Chief Constables, July 1923; Frederick White to MCS, August 9, 1923.

²⁴ PRO-HO 45/11382, minute by S W Harris, dated June 27, 1923.

²⁵ PRO-HO 45/11382, circular 446,368/3, June 30, 1923.

²⁶ Hall, *Marie Stopes*, op cit, p 245, footnote quoting a local newspaper advertisement for *Maisie's Marriage*, July 21, 1923; PRO-HO 45/11382, correspondence between Home Office and Sheffield Chief Constable, July and August 1923.

²⁷ PRO-HO 45/11382, MCS to Home Office, July 11, 1923; Home Office to MCS, July 12, 1923; BL-SC ADD 58507, MCS to Home Office, July 14, 1923; Home Office to MCS, July 17, 1923.

²⁸ Hall, *Marie Stopes*, op cit, p 245.

²⁹ All references to *Maisie's Marriage* herein are based on the print of the film in possession of the Samuelson family, which was loaned to the author by David Samuelson. This print has a censor's certificate which is placed *after* the title card.

³⁰ BL-SC ADD 58507, Napoleon Films to MCS, July 2, 1923.

Whatever the case, the Home Office was convinced that a 'fraudulent and impudent evasion'²⁴ had indeed taken place, and was moved to take the unprecedented step of intervening directly at local level in the censorship of a film. On June 30, a confidential administrative circular was issued to local licensing authorities in England and Wales, endorsing the BBFC's and the LCC's actions with regard to *Maisie's Marriage*, and expressing the hope that local authorities would 'only allow the revised form of the film to be exhibited under the conditions agreed to by the publishers'.²⁵ But even this remarkable excursion into State censorship failed to produce the desired result.²⁶ Furthermore, the film's producers managed to find out about the Home Office's 'confidential' circular, and within three weeks of its issue, Marie Stopes had threatened the Home Office with legal action and had a personal interview with the Home Secretary himself, who responded in somewhat conciliatory manner by assuring her that there had never been any intention that her name should be forbidden to appear on the film or in advertising for it. Nevertheless, while admitting that the BBFC's ruling had no status in law, the Home Office refused to climb down to the extent of withdrawing the June 30 circular.²⁷ Only a few days later, in a renewed wave of publicity, the judgement on appeal in the Stopes-Sutherland libel case was handed down. This coincidence of events finally assured the success of *Maisie's Marriage*.²⁸ Censorship had produced the very opposite effect to that which had been intended by the Censors.

III

Not ours to preach nor yet to point a moral—yet if, in the unfolding of our story, there is aught that comforts, helps or guides, then are our efforts doubly paid.

So begins *Maisie's Marriage*²⁹, at once disclaiming and confirming its status as a film with a message. After this, the story begins:

The Burrows family live in Slumland but their prototypes dwell in all our cities—wherever our artificial civilisation has planted its weeds where the struggle for existence is hard and ruthless and the narrow dogma of our disciplined beliefs turn life and the joys of living into meaningless phrases.

The 'Slumland' setting is a concession to the Censor, who objected to the geographical specificity of the original Camberwell.³⁰ Maisie's family, the Burrowses, are characterised as representing a particular social group, whose misery is signalled in the scene of poverty, overcrowding and familial discord which follows the opening intertitle: mother overworked and weary, children quarrelsome, babies snivelling, father drunk and violent. Next we are introduced to Maisie, the film's heroine and the eldest of the ten Burrows children, at work as a waitress: smart, pretty, polite and smiling, yet capable of handling with firmness and determination customers' sexual advances. If the other Burrowses

are specimens of the 'weeds' referred to in the introduction, this weed-choked garden has somehow produced a perfect rose in Maisie.

What is already implicit in the contrasting characterisations and locations of these first two scenes—that Maisie does not really belong with her family—is soon confirmed in the story that follows. The agency of the inevitable separation of Maisie from the Burrowses comes in the character of Dick Reading, a fireman stationed opposite Maisie's place of work, an only child who enjoys an affectionate relationship with his mother. The young pair are brought together by Dick's dog, and their encounter inspires in Maisie both intimations of erotic pleasure ('dim tremulous thoughts of waking womanhood') and fear of what yielding to such impulses will bring ('It's drudgery—drudgery—drudgery—then there'll be children we can't afford to clothe or keep'). Unwilling to face the prospect of becoming like her cowed and worn-out mother, Maisie refuses Dick's offer of marriage, despite the fact that she loves him. But Maisie's parting from her sweetheart also brings about her separation from her family: Maisie's brutish father, overhearing her telling Dick 'I'm afraid you'd be like my father in a few years', throws her out for her ingratitude:

Now listen ter me, girl—if yer father's roof ain't good enough ter shelter yer—yer'd better pack yer fings and clear—and good riddance to yer.

Maisie, like many another romantic heroine, is now alone in a world which turns out to be full of pitfalls for an attractive and sexually innocent young woman. On her first night away from home, she falls into the questionable company of prostitutes, and narrowly avoids losing her virtue to a man whose wife's frigidity has forced him to seek solace elsewhere. Fortunately, he turns out to be a gentleman and Maisie escapes intact, only to be frightened out of her wits ('Forms that lurk in every shadow—Faces that leer at every turn') merely by finding herself where no decent girl ought to be—out alone on the streets. Desperate, she tries to commit suicide by jumping off a bridge, but in a suspenseful scene involving much cross-cutting, is saved from drowning by Paul Sterling, a successful and comfortably-off writer whose wife immediately takes pity on Maisie and offers to take her home. But Maisie's troubles are far from over: her suicide attempt brings her to court, where she is sentenced to two months' imprisonment.

Through a series of lacks—of a proper family life, of a man, and (most crucial of all) of a particular type of knowledge—Maisie is exposed to a whole range of perils. It is not merely that, in common with many an *ingénue* heroine of silent cinema, Maisie's virtue is constantly at risk: so too are her liberty and even her life. But the conventions of the narrative genre to which this story belongs—the popular romance—as well as the imperatives of the vehicle of its telling—popular cinema—require a happy ending. For this to be possible, Maisie's lacks must be liquidated and Maisie herself brought from danger to safety.³¹

The first lack—of a family—is in some measure dealt with by the inter-

³¹ This approach to the analysis of narrative is based on the work of Vladimir Propp, *The Morphology of the Folk Tale*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1968.

vention of the Sterlings, who take Maisie into service as a maid when she is released from prison. The Sterling family is all that the Burrowses are not: small, financially secure and happily ensconced in a delightful home with a huge garden. The Sterlings have three charming and adored children, whose antics awake in Maisie 'the longing that has dwelt unaltered through the ages in every woman's heart'. But it is clear that the Sterlings cannot provide Maisie with the 'proper' family she lacks. Aside from a not inconsiderable class difference, Maisie can never be a 'real' mother to the Sterling children, not even, as it turns out, can she be an adequate mother-substitute: they already have a nanny, and when Maisie is eventually given sole charge of them, disaster strikes – the house catches fire. Maisie may long for happiness of the kind the Sterlings enjoy, but she can never attain it by becoming part of that family. Instead she must deal with the lack of a proper family by making her own, which in the world of the popular romance means only one thing – the liquidation of another of the narrative's lacks, Maisie's of a man. Maisie must marry.

And that, of course, is exactly how the story – 'like all true fairy tales', in the words of the film's closing title – ends. But what of the problem that separated Maisie in the first place from both her man and her family of origin. What of her fear of the consequences of marriage? Here again the agency of the Sterlings – or more precisely that of Mrs Sterling – is crucial. For it is Mrs Sterling who explains that what Maisie most fears is not after all inevitable:

1. IT: 'I will tell you a story, dear, a parable. There were two men each owning a garden of roses, but the trees of the first grew wild and untended'.
2. MCU two-shot Maisie and Mrs Sterling talking. FADE.
3. MS a sickly-looking rose bush.
4. IT: 'But though the blossoms grew heavy on the branches, they were meagre and colourless'.
5. MCU several unhealthy looking roses. FADE.
6. As shot 2.
7. IT: 'But the other was wiser – armed with knowledge he pruned his tree carefully'.
8. As shot 2.
9. MCU hands pruning a rose.
10. IT: 'Each bud was cared for and nurtured, and though his roses were fewer – each bud had turned into a perfect flower'.
11. MS some perfect roses. DISSOLVE.
12. CU one perfect rose. DISSOLVE into face of baby. FADE.
13. MS two-shot Maisie and Mrs Sterling talking. Maisie remains unreassured.
14. IT: 'Before I married, I used to think of my lover – somewhere in the world – searching for me – passing all others by – never resting till we met – and I think this is true, dear'.

Maisie, the rose among the weeds, now has it within her power not only to produce perfect roses of her own, but also to secure lasting conjugal bliss with a true lover. All that remains is for the former sweethearts to be reunited in a dramatic scene in which Maisie is rescued from fire by Dick and his ever-faithful dog. Not only does Maisie get her man, she will, it is suggested, also enjoy both 'married love' and a planned family.

Maisie's Marriage may be read at a number of levels, though only one of these is strictly necessary to the production of a 'culturally competent' reading of the film. At this most readily-available level, *Maisie's Marriage* may be regarded as an ordinary love-story, with elements of drama, suspense and action, and with characterisations and narrational strategies typical of the fiction cinema of the period. Among these are a 'woman-in-peril' theme (Maisie endures trials by water and by fire); drama and suspense created through action and cross-cutting (evident notably in the two scenes in which Maisie is rescued); tender love scenes (Dick's proposals of marriage); melodramatic conflict (family rows, Maisie in court standing trial for attempted suicide); sentimentality (Dick's dog, the Sterling children, their kittens); themes of female virtue and male rapacity (two scenes in which Maisie deals with sexual harassment at work, her excursion into London lowlife with the prostitutes); and a 'fairy tale' ending (the wedding of Maisie and Dick in the final scene). All things considered, *Maisie's Marriage* is certainly readable as no more complex than a commonplace popular romance, in which lovers are parted through no fault of their own, and after a series of vicissitudes are reunited and marry.

In this type of story, the narrative pivots on the cause of the lovers' parting. In *Maisie's Marriage*, it is fear – fear not so much of sex itself as of what the heroine sees as its inevitable consequences – which separates the lovers. A satisfactory resolution of the narrative calls for a dissolution of Maisie's fears about sexual love and marriage, which is brought about in turn by her enlightenment on certain issues. It is at exactly the level of questions of sexuality, sexual pleasure, family limitation and marital harmony that the film exceeds its purely narrative enunciation, embodying a discourse that, while taking the narrative as its starting point, also transcends it. This excess lies partly in what may be termed the moral address of the film, and it is at this level that the 'message' of *Maisie's Marriage* is articulated.

By definition, narrative films with 'messages' adopt a position on, or speak on behalf of, issues which are in some sense external to the individual fiction in question, but are nevertheless dovetailed with it. The merits of such films are commonly judged according to the seamlessness with which fiction and 'message' are interwoven, since there is always a risk that the one may dominate the other. If the 'message' dominates, a film can be dismissed as 'mere' propaganda, while if the story is dominant, it easily becomes submerged, or – and this may simply be another way of saying the same thing – the film may open itself up to a range of different, and potentially conflicting, readings. Given the ascendancy of fictional narrative in cinema and the expectations this generates in audi-

ences, the latter type of 'film with a message' can be rather unstable as a bearer of meaning. If *Maisie's Marriage* is considered in these terms – for fiction cinema had already achieved institutional dominance well before 1923 – it is clear that the film belongs to the second category: that is, as a film with a message, if not as a romantic narrative, it may be regarded as in some degree 'open' and its moral message optional. It may nevertheless be useful to look at the film from the point of view of its enunciative qualities – as it articulates discourses through which different meanings are produced – if only because this raises the question of the precise conditions under which particular readings of a film become available.

This is pertinent to the question of the 'moral lessons' of *Maisie's Marriage*. For in order to read the film as being 'about' birth control, or 'about' sex or sexual pleasure, certain sorts of knowledge must guide its reading: for example, a prior awareness of the existence of Marie Stopes, of the general tenor of her ideas, and perhaps a more direct acquaintance with the content of such books as *Married Love* and *Wise Parenthood*. The events surrounding the various attempts at suppressing the film would certainly suggest that such knowledge was at issue. All parties involved in these events agreed that the film's capacity to disseminate ideas, to make money, or to make trouble, lay precisely in its association with the name of Marie Stopes and all that this implied, particularly in the summer of 1923. The conflict was never really about the film's content: it was about the conditions in which it was constructed as a film with a particular message.

What is the nature of this embattled message of *Maisie's Marriage*, then, and how does it engage those discourses which allow the film to be read as bearing a particular message? First of all, the message is not unitary: it incorporates a number of voices, some of which are more insistent than others. Among the most insistent must be the relationship the film sets up, notably in the scenes in the Burrows household, between large families, poverty and unhappy home life. However, to make a connection between these things and the failure to limit fertility probably calls for a certain amount of knowledge about birth control, for the point is certainly not made explicitly in the film. Secondly and relatedly, it might be inferred from the ways in which Dick and his mother and more particularly the Sterlings are represented, that small families are happy and healthy families. Again, this does not on its own call forth the conclusion that they may be so by intention more than by chance, though this was hinted at in the one intertitle deleted at the BBFC's request. In explaining to Dick why she will not marry him, Maisie says: 'Your father died before he did the harm mine's done.'

It is in the sequence in which Mrs Sterling tells Maisie the parable of the rose growers, though, that the film approaches the birth control question more directly. The pruning metaphor, taken directly from *Wise Parenthood*³², encapsulates Marie Stopes's characteristic combination of eugenic and health/welfare arguments on behalf of birth control. To readers of the book among the film's audience, the reference would be obvious. But the sequence condenses into a few shots a rather specific set

³² Marie Carmichael Stopes, *Wise Parenthood: The Treatise on Birth Control for Married People*, 10th edition, London, G P Putnam's Sons Ltd, 1922, chapter 1.

of pro-birth control arguments (arguments which would not have been universally endorsed even within the birth control movement itself). These images function purely metaphorically and their meaning is in no measure fixed by the intertitles. On its own, then, the 'parable' remains relatively 'open': though in the shot in which a close-up of a rose dissolves into a baby's face, it does provide the film's least oblique allusion to birth control. The metaphor of pruning is anchored to some extent, then; though significantly, not verbally. Contraception must remain unspoken in the text.

A 'moral' reading of *Maisie's Marriage* extracts more than simply an endorsement of birth control, however, even if this might be its readiest message. The film is also 'about' sexual pleasure in marriage, which was in fact the central topic of *Married Love*. According to Stopes, the control of fertility was a necessary, but by no means sufficient, condition of marital happiness. She advanced the view – revolutionary in its time – that sex was a good thing (though only within marriage) and its enjoyment a positive value in itself, essential to conjugal harmony and family contentment. To this end, she exhorted husbands to be sensitive to their wives' sexual needs and desires, and both husbands and wives to perfect their lovemaking techniques.³³ Nothing of this, of course, is explicit in *Maisie's Marriage*, though to readers of *Married Love* references to Stopes's views on sex would be obvious enough at various points throughout the film.

The scene in which Maisie visits a nightclub ('A mystic underworld behind closed doors, where Bacchus and Aphrodite fox-trot to a negroid Pan') is one such moment. She is paired off with a man, manifestly drunk, who confides in her that the wife he loves is frigid ('Man's a man – flesh and blood – can't mate with an icicle!'). In the subjective sequence which follows, the man's affectionate advance to his wife is rebuffed, while she devotes her attention to a pet pekinese. In *Married Love*, Stopes suggests that if married couples were to cultivate an enjoyment of sex for its own sake, husbands would have neither the need nor the desire to resort to prostitutes³⁴, an eventuality which would evidently take care of several social problems at a stroke. Similarly, a scene involving the Sterling children and their pregnant cat invokes Stopes's arguments in favour of openness with children on sexual matters:³⁵

Child: *Why must we be special kind to Amelia, Mummy?*

Mrs S: *It's because Amelia is going to be a mother and have several little kitten-children just as I have you.*

For Marie Stopes, sexual pleasure in marriage and a frank and open attitude to discussion of sexual matters went hand-in-hand with a happy and loving partnership between husband and wife. The flamboyantly sentimental manner in which this aspect of Stopes's teaching was at times expressed in her writings³⁶ also has its echoes in the film, where such expression fits well with the generic requirements of the romantic narrative. As Mrs Sterling says to Maisie,

³³ Stopes, *Married Love*, op cit, chapter 5.

³⁴ *ibid*, chapter 3.

³⁵ Marie Carmichael Stopes, *Radiant Motherhood: a Book for Those Who Are Creating the Future*, 4th edition, London, G P Putnam's Sons Ltd, 1925, chapter 18.

³⁶ 'The half-swooning sense of flux which overtakes the spirit in that eternal moment at the apex of rapture, sweeps into its flaming tides the whole essence of man and woman' (*Married Love*, op cit, p 130). This is by no means untypical.

Before I was married, I used to think of my lover – somewhere in the world – searching for me – passing all others by – never resting till we met – and I think this is true, dear.

To a considerable extent, then, *Maisie's Marriage* is readable as a film with a message by virtue only of its implication within discourses on sexuality, sexual pleasure and birth control. It acquires its moral address in its engagement with such discourses, especially as these latter are articulated in the writings of Marie Stopes. This does not, however, mean that a moral reading of the film was available only to readers of Stopes's books, simply that prior knowledge of this kind offers the readiest access to a certain reading of the film. Stopes's name was known to millions who had never read a word she had written: she was a highly controversial figure and her work touched on topics which had the seductive lure of the taboo. Moreover, at the time *Maisie's Marriage* appeared, her court appearances in the Sutherland libel suit had placed her in the forefront of public awareness. If many people did not know precisely what Marie Stopes's ideas were, they certainly knew what they were about: sex and birth control. Whether the name of Marie Stopes was attached to them or not, these were burning issues of the day. It is in this context that the moral address of *Maisie's Marriage* must be understood. To the extent that such an address speaks through the film text, it may be heard in part or in whole; soft and muted, or loud and clear. Indeed, it need not even be heard at all, for the film is perfectly intelligible without it. And yet it was the film's moral address that inspired the mobilisation of all the machinery of censorship; and it is precisely through censorship that the film is constructed as troublesome, as conveying a 'controversial' message. In this sense, censorship did for the film what the film could not have done for itself.

But if *Maisie's Marriage* acquires certain meanings by virtue of discourses originating outside the film text itself, such meanings pervade the text at an unconscious as well as a conscious level. These are centred upon the problem of *knowledge*. Maisie lacks knowledge of a particular kind, and it is Mrs Sterling who, with her happy family and loving husband, possesses and passes on the knowledge that Maisie lacks. In this respect, *Maisie's Marriage* departs somewhat from other 'films with a message' of the period, which tend to construct institutions and practices such as science, medicine, social welfare and the law as repositories and agencies of knowledge. Even where, in line with the demands of narrative cinema, such knowledge is spoken by a character in the fiction, that character invariably stands in for an institutional source. But if the Mrs Sterling character in *Maisie's Marriage* is a stand-in, what exactly is she representing? Women's traditional knowledge of matters emotional, sexual and reproductive? Possibly, but the portrayal of the Sterlings – of Mrs Sterling in particular – suggests otherwise: that Mrs Sterling, independent-minded, happily married purveyor of useful knowledge and good advice, is none other than Marie Stopes herself.

This conclusion acquires added force from an examination of the class

relations of knowledge proposed in the film. The working class is constructed as either lacking in knowledge, or incapable of articulating knowledge, or both. Yet since the narrative demands that the working-class heroine acquire it, the missing knowledge must be provided from some source. Sure enough, it is: and a middle-class woman, who also happens to be the employer of its recipient, is that source. Knowledge is imparted, then, not so much through gender solidarity—a woman passing on female lore to another woman—as through a relation that, for this one purpose only, crosses a social class divide. It is class difference, then, rather than gender solidarity which here provides the condition for the communication of narratively crucial knowledge. The ‘truth’ about sexual pleasure, about birth control, about married love, is not universally available in society, nor is it evenly distributed between the different classes. But it can nevertheless be communicated across class barriers by good works—acts of personal kindness, generosity or patronage by the middle class towards the working class. If this sums up Marie Stopes’s personal view of her mission to educate the working classes in matters sexual and reproductive, it represents only one of several positions in circulation at the time within the birth control movement on the question of the dissemination of knowledge.³⁷ In this sense, in its subtextual address, *Maisie’s Marriage* adopts a somewhat partisan stance in its advocacy of birth control—a stance precisely privileging Marie Stopes (or ‘Marie Stopes’³⁸).

At the same time, however, the subtextual organisation of knowledge in *Maisie’s Marriage* as originating in ‘Marie Stopes’ may enter into conflict with the narrative and cinematic imperatives of the genre to which the film belongs, and which produce its most insistent reading. If the popular romantic narrative requires that lovers be subjected to needless separation in order that they may ultimately be reunited, it also demands that the reader understand more than the unfortunate couple about exactly what it is that has separated them. The reader must be aware that the lovers’ parting is unnecessary in order that the pleasure of its poignancy may be fully indulged, while the reader remains safe in the knowledge that matters can, and certainly will, be sorted out in the end. In the case of *Maisie’s Marriage*, then, generic imperatives would suggest that spectators of the film ought to know what Maisie does not know. But, as has been noted, while in 1923 some audience members might well have been in this position, many undoubtedly would not: for this would call for knowledge which was in many respects esoteric at this time.

To the extent that *Maisie’s Marriage* addresses a knowing spectator, and to the extent that readers of *Married Love* and *Wise Parenthood* would be forearmed with the necessary knowledge, the film’s address must surely be, in some degree at least, class-specific. Given the social composition of the book-buying public, the film divides its audience, more-or-less along lines of class, into groups with differing narrative viewpoints. Since the film was constituted as censorable almost entirely in regard to its status as a ‘message’ film, the problem from the BBFC’s point of view was the section of the audience that did not know—namely,

³⁷ Dowse and Peel, ‘The Politics of Birth Control’, op cit.

³⁸ Here Stopes—regarded as ‘author’, as a creative subjectivity behind the film to which her name is attached—is to be seen as distinct from ‘Stopes’—a convenient label for a subtext, a structure which underlies the film but is not reducible to the input or conscious intent of a person or persons. See Peter Wollen, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*, London, Secker and Warburg, 1972, pp 167-8.

³⁹ On Stopes's protest to the Home Office that attempts were being made to delete her name from the film, S W Harris expressed the private opinion that 'I never imagined this could be part of the undertaking (desirable as it might be).' PRO-HO 45/11382, handwritten Home Office minute, dated July 12, 1923.

the working class.

It has already been argued that the excess of censorship activity inspired by *Maisie's Marriage* had a great deal to do with the film's association with the name of Marie Stopes. And it is clear that the various parties involved in the censorship process were well aware of this, too. They were obviously at some level conscious also of the film's instability as a carrier of knowledge of certain kinds. The BBFC's most significant demands – that the title *Married Love* not be used and that no suggestion be made in advertising the film that it was based on Marie Stopes's book – show this clearly enough, for they are aimed precisely at inhibiting the availability (especially, presumably, to that section of the audience that 'did not know' – the working class) of a 'moral' reading of the film. Hence the strongly-expressed irritation of both Censors and Home Office officials, and the unprecedented resort to the latter to direct intervention at local level, when infringements of these prohibitions came to light.

But Marie Stopes's figuration in *Maisie's Marriage* operates at several levels, not all of them subject to the operations of censorship. Firstly, and most obviously, Stopes figures as the film's author: in the opening title, she is co-credited (complete with academic qualifications) with its writing:

G.B. Samuelson presents
MAISIE'S MARRIAGE
A Story specially written for the Screen
 by
DR MARIE STOPES DSc PhD
in collaboration with
CAPTAIN WALTER SUMMERS

At this level, censorship was powerless to intervene, much as those involved might have wished to do so: Marie Stopes, leading light of the Society of Authors, was in a position to see to it that she kept her writer's credit, on the screen at least.³⁹ As regards the film's advertising and promotion, these matters rested ultimately in the hands of the film trade, of exhibitors in particular, rather than either with Marie Stopes on the one hand or with the Film Censors on the other.

Secondly, and more importantly, Marie Stopes – or perhaps rather her writings and other propagandising activities – figures as the locus of that knowledge which makes possible a reading of *Maisie's Marriage* as a film with a certain message. It is at this reading, as has been suggested, that the operations of censorship were largely directed. But even these efforts at prohibition had unexpected, even contradictory, effects: far from limiting the availability of a 'moral' reading of the film, they actually proposed such a reading, certainly once the prohibition was made public. Finally, though, there is one more level at which Marie Stopes – or in this case 'Marie Stopes' – figures within the film: this is in its sub-text, in which 'Stopes' is constituted as the enunciative source of narratively crucial knowledge. The subtextual level is beyond the reach of any

institutional practices of censorship. As the BBFC's paltry demands for alterations indicate, there was little in the film's surface content that could be regarded, in terms of these practices, as 'prohibitive'. Apart from serving to justify the BBFC's delay in releasing the film, the very minor changes asked for are perhaps to be interpreted as symptomatic of an awareness – in part conscious, in part unconscious – that the real roots of the film's troublesomeness lay elsewhere.

As part of a larger work-in-progress on film censorship between 1909 and 1925, the conclusions of this study must be regarded as provisional. © Annette Kuhn, 1986.

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ALL THE WEEK.
 THE FILM SENSATION OF THE AGE.
 FREE LIST ENTIRELY SUSPENDED.
FOR ADULTS ONLY
 WHAT'S IN A NAME?
 The Original Title of our Film cannot be
 used by order of the Home Office:
 so
 ? ? ? ? ? (CAN YOU GUESS?)
 will be shown as
MAISIE'S MARRIAGE
 A Film for all thinking MEN and WOMEN to whom
 PURITY is TRUTH and TRUTH is PURITY.
 THIS FILM IS SPECIALLY WRITTEN FOR THE SCREEN by
DR. MARIE STOPES
 In Collaboration with CAPT. W. SUMMERS
 A SPECIAL OUTING will be shown at SATURDAY MATINEE for 6d. Free
 NO ADVANCE IN PRICES. BOOK NOW

'BABY FACE' OR HOW JOE BREEN MADE BARBARA STANWYCK ATONE FOR CAUSING THE WALL STREET CRASH

BY RICHARD MALTBY

IN ORDER TO ensure the appearance of legitimacy for its actions, censorship is obliged to imagine an audience for the text it is censoring, and assess that audience's cumulative response to its various discourses. In this activity of imagining audiences, if not in the motivation for it, the behaviour of censorship resembles that of criticism. It is, indeed, at this point of correspondence that the examination of censorship procedures may prove useful to that critical activity which calls itself theory. Obviously, the institution of censorship is not independent of other social forces; the censorship procedures established by the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America, Inc (MPPDA) during the 1920s and 1930s integrated 'self-regulation' within the larger institution of cinema production, distribution and exhibition. Under the supervision of the Studio Relations Committee (SRC), the application of the Production Code preceded the pro-filmic event, and was in part justified to the producers in terms of the financial savings incurred by not shooting unusable material. Primary documentation regarding the procedures of censorship might be expected to reveal, with greater accuracy than, say, the reminiscences of directors, how the institution of cinema intended and expected its products to be received.

Such a documented guide to expected meaning may be of particular use in considering potentially subversive readings of Hollywood texts. The production of a subversive reading can be described as a process by which the critic constitutes him or herself as the subject of a text in some way other than that which the text proposes. Necessarily, the subversive reading must claim knowledge of a preferred reading. It is evident from the extent of critical disagreement over, for example, the preferred reading of *Blonde Venus* or *She Done Him Wrong*, that particular periods and representations present problems of ambiguity in establishing what constitutes a preferred reading.



The Banker and his Baby: George Brent as Trenholm and Barbara Stanwyck as Lily.

In an account of *Dance, Girl, Dance* as a critique of patriarchy, Claire Johnston privileges 'Dorothy Arzner' as an agency of extra-cinematic intention identifiable from within the realm of the cinematic.¹ In her analysis of *Blonde Venus*, E Ann Kaplan goes a stage further in distinguishing between the intentions of 'Dietrich' in her performance and those of 'Von Sternberg' in his direction of that performance:

*[Dietrich's] understanding of the extra-cinematic discourse she is being placed in permits a certain distance from what is being done to her, providing a gap through which the female spectator can glimpse her construction in patriarchy.*²

As the subject of creative play among the discourses of the text, the critic may feel able to move at will between the realms of the cinematic and the extra-cinematic, and the privileging of specific elements of the extra-cinematic may be further justified in the name of polemic. However, if the critic-as-subject is restrained only by the subjectivity of the critic, the limits of permissible reading become difficult to establish. As the above examples indicate, constructing a purely cinematic criticism which only engages 'what results from the cinematic apparatus'³ is extraordinarily difficult and also necessarily ahistorical. Such criticism can discuss ideology only if it presupposes that the ideology it discusses is stable and unchanging.

Like censorship itself, history intrudes upon the playful critic as a machine for the repression of subversive meaning, providing among other things tools for the examination of intent. As such, it operates anti-thetically to structuralist and psychoanalytic approaches. It may, however, be employed dialectically in the hope of generating a synthesis which educates the text both from itself and from its historical specificity. There would seem to be at least potential fruitfulness in combining an analytical framework with an historical contextualisation, which, while not determining a single reading, suggests limits to the range of meanings available at the moment of production.

I

In what has become the standard text-book for American film history courses, Robert Sklar argues that

*In the first half decade of the Great Depression, Hollywood's movie-makers perpetrated one of the most remarkable challenges to traditional values in the history of mass commercial entertainment. The movies called into question sexual propriety, social decorum and the institutions of law and order.*⁴

Sklar implies an element of intent on the part of 'Hollywood's movie-makers' and also that the censorship procedures adopted by the industry in February 1930 were inadequate to prevent producers resorting to the more explicit depiction of sex and violence as a means of holding on to a

¹ 'Towards the end of the film Arzner brings about her tour de force, cracking open the entire fabric of the film and exposing the workings of the ideology in the construction of the stereotype of woman.' Claire Johnston, 'Woman's Cinema as Counter Cinema', in Patricia Ehlens (ed), *Sexual Stratagems: The World of Women in Film*, New York, Horizon Press, 1979, p 141.

² E Ann Kaplan, *Women and Film: Both Sides of the Camera*, London and New York, Methuen, 1983, p 52.

³ *ibid*, p 20.

⁴ Robert Sklar, *Movie-Made America*, New York, Random House, 1975, p 175.

declining audience. Taking their cue primarily from Raymond Moley's paean of praise to business self-regulation, *The Hays Office*, most accounts of the period suggest that

*The years 1930-1933 passed without a notable improvement in the quality of pictures and without the elimination of those objectionable themes and treatments which had brought about the creation and adoption of the Code.*⁵

Revisionist historians have interpreted the 'official' account of the limited effectiveness of censorship as opening up the possibility of Hollywood's producing 'subversive' films.

*Suppose for the sake of argument that scarcely any Hollywood films of the 1930s were actively hostile to capitalism in a direct political sense. One could nevertheless make a case for saying that Hollywood was in certain ways strongly subversive of the dominant sexual ideology. How else can one explain the outrage of groups such as the League [sic] of Decency and Hollywood's attempts to censor itself through the adoption of the Motion Picture Production Code.*⁶

The case for Hollywood's subversion of dominant sexual ideology is made in Molly Haskell's *From Reverence to Rape*, where she suggests that

*It was really in the early 30s that the revolutionary 20s spirit, at least the questioning of marriage and conventional morality, took hold.*⁷

Sklar refers to 'the Golden Age of Turbulence' between 1930 and 1934 as 'an aberration, a surprise even to Hollywood itself'.⁸ The aberration may, however, lie more in the interpretation than in the event. If the movies of the early 1930s were declaring their proclaimed sexual and other radicalism, they would constitute an aberration both in terms of the general trend in popular culture during the early Depression years, and the movies' ideological behaviour during the rest of their history. While such behaviour is possible, it is unlikely enough to require substantial critical proof.

The textual evidence for Hollywood's 'challenge to traditional values' is conventionally provided by readings of a group of films invariably including three gangster movies, *I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang*, *Mae West*, the Marx Brothers, and seldom totalling more than 20 movies, or less than 1% of Hollywood's feature film output during the period 1930-34. It is too small and too familiar a sample on which to base so substantial a conclusion as that the film-makers of Hollywood were fomenting social or moral disorder, particularly when the list does not correspond very closely with those films with which the censors themselves – both inside and outside the Hays Office – were most concerned.

However, it is clear enough that many movies of the period contain symptoms of a cultural crisis within patriarchal capitalism: in crime films, the recurring motif of the death of the father, and the inadequacy

⁵ Raymond Moley, *The Hays Office*, New York, Bobbs-Merrill, 1946, p 75.

⁶ Edward Buscombe, 'Bread and Circuses: Economics and the Cinema' in Patricia Mellencamp and Philip Rosen (eds), *Cinema Histories, Cinema Practices*, Los Angeles, American Film Institute, 1984, p 8.

⁷ Molly Haskell: *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies*, New York, Holt Reinhart and Winston, 1974, p 45.

⁸ Sklar, op cit, p 176.

of a figure who seeks to speak in the name of the father; the frequent depiction of a 'distaste for the nuclear family' which Kaplan identifies in *Blonde Venus*⁹. It is equally clear, though much less remarked upon, that a significant number of the films of the early 1930s, including many of those discussed within conventional histories, were themselves accounts of the events of the previous decade, and, in common with much other cultural production of the period, reflected on how the events of that decade had led to the Crash.¹⁰ It is in this broader context of capitalism's representation of itself at a particular moment of crisis that patriarchy's distinctive representation of Woman and female sexuality during this period can best be placed.

The decade after the First World War was witness to the extensive development of a mass consumer culture in America, marked most strongly by the growth of advertising. Elements of this culture found themselves in strenuous conflict with the cultural and social patterns of Victorian patriarchal sensibility, a conflict indicated by the widespread image of generational antagonism that pervaded much of the period's popular culture. Much of the conflict was oriented around a revision of prevailing codes of sexuality; as advertising promoted the act of consumption as therapeutic process, it encouraged, in its imagery, a revaluation of the cultural place of the erotic. Movies participated in this process in two distinct realms: narrative and spectacle. In narrative terms, as Lary May¹¹ has documented, movies told stories in which an exuberant American female sexuality was revealed to be monogamous and innocent. The De Mille films of the early 1920s were comedies of remarriage, in which a sexuality discovered outside the conventions of Victorian patriarchy was relocated within a revised version of the institution. Acts of consumption were crucial to this process; by providing novelty through a change of appearances, they offered the means to preserve monogamy. The culture of consumption promoted fashion as a mechanism of change that in itself not only increased the obligation to consume but provided a substitute for other, more politically active, forms of change. The pre-war energies of middle-class feminism proved particularly vulnerable to such recuperative diversion.

*The emphasis on self-realization through emotional fulfillment, the devaluation of public life in favor of a leisure world of intense private experience, the need to construct a pleasing 'self' by purchasing consumer goods – these therapeutic imperatives helped to domesticate the drive toward female emancipation. With great fanfare, advertisers offered women the freedom to smoke Lucky Strikes or buy 'natural' corsets. They promised fake liberation through consumption, and many women accepted this new version of male hegemony.*¹²

By offering themselves to their audiences as idols of consumption both within the movies themselves and through the secondary industries of publicity, stars took a significant role in advertising the therapeutic pleasures of the intense life.

⁹ Kaplan, *op cit*, p 56.

¹⁰ e.g. *I Am A Fugitive from a Chain Gang, Public Enemy*.

¹¹ Lary May, *Screening Out the Past: The Birth of Mass Culture and the Motion Picture Industry*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1980, p 211.

¹² T J Jackson Lears, 'From Salvation to Self-Realization: Advertising and the Therapeutic Roots of the Consumer Culture, 1880-1930', in Richard Wrightman Fox and T J Jackson Lears (eds), *The Culture of Consumption: Critical Essays in American History, 1880-1980*, New York, Pantheon Books, 1983, p 27.

*All the adventure, all the romance, all the excitement you lack in your daily life are in – Pictures. They take you completely out of yourself into a wonderful new world. . . . Out of the cage of everyday existence! If only for an afternoon or an evening – escape!*¹³

The generalised advertising of American consumer goods was one of the ways in which Will Hays, President of the MPPDA, insisted that 'The Movies Are Helping America'.

*In pictures orderly and effective home-keeping equipment for sweeping, scrubbing, washing, stirring, mixing, sewing, made their appearance, and gradually it became plain that these things freed woman from enervating toil. From the picture to the fact was an inevitable procedure. Gradually these things liberated woman to express herself in terms more befitting her dignity.*¹⁴

The culture of consumption described the newly dignified woman as 'manager' of her home, but in the movies she celebrated her liberation from domestic drudgery through an anxious concern with appearance, in preparation for erotic activity. Both the advertising industry and the movies 'engaged in a therapeutic renovation of sensuality . . . locating eroticism in settings characterized by affluence, respectability, and, above all, health'¹⁵.

Their promotion of consumer culture constructed and revealed the contradiction of its representation of woman as object but not subject of desire. Female sexuality was recuperated in narrative terms within the constraints of monogamy, but it pervaded the culture as spectacle – a spectacle publicly directed at women, and overtly representing a new realisation of the female self. In De Mille's bath scenes and advertisements for toiletries sensuality was cleansed of 'Victorian associations with poverty, disease, and dirt'¹⁶. A recurring image showed women observing themselves in mirrors.

*I saw my body. I saw my legs, my torso, my long, long arms I had never looked at my body as a piece of statuary. . . . I had this marvelous feeling. I can still feel the chills all over my body.*¹⁷

Stuart Ewen's analysis of cosmetic advertisements focuses more explicitly on auto-erotic perception.

*Though the victorious heroines . . . always got their man, they did so out of a commodity defined self-fetishization which made that man and themselves almost irrelevant to the quality of their victory. Their romantic triumphs were ultimately commercially defined versions of the auto-erotic ones of Alban Berg's prostitute, Lulu, who declares that 'When I looked at myself in the mirror I wished I were a man – a man married to me.'*¹⁸

As in pornography, the auto-eroticism of the gaze in the mirror ratifies the voyeurism of the male gaze. However, the cinematic representation

¹³ Advertisement in the *Saturday Evening Post* quoted in Robert S Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd, *Middletown: A Study in Modern American Culture*, Harcourt, Brace and World, 1929, p 265.

¹⁴ Will H Hays, 'The Movies Are Helping America', *Good Housekeeping*, January 1933, pp 45, 130.

¹⁵ Lears, op cit, p 28.

¹⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁷ Actress Betty Blythe, in Kevin Brownlow, *The Parade's Gone By*, p 436, quoted in May, op cit, p 230.

¹⁸ Stuart Ewen, *Captains of Consciousness: Advertising and the Social Roots of the Consumer Culture*, New York, McGraw-Hill, 1976, p 48.

also established an irreconcilable contradiction between the indiscriminate availability of woman as an object of scopophilic desire and the narrative insistence on the constriction of her permitted sexuality within monogamy. This contradiction, and its apparent resolution around voyeuristic/narcissistic identification within contemporary psychoanalytic theory, is historically more specific than theorists of patriarchy sometimes imply. It depends on the appearance of permissive, auto-erotic images of female sexuality, and while these were a staple of visual pornography, such images only began to proliferate in the culture through advertising and the movies in the 1920s. It was precisely the spread of such images that the reform groups were criticising.

II

The film industry had been a substantial beneficiary of Progressive reform and Prohibition, but reformers maintained a wary concern over the possible deleterious effects – both physical and moral – of movies on their audiences. Throughout the 1920s the MPPDA managed to contain this concern through an elaborate public relations exercise which co-opted potentially troublesome organisations, such as the General Federation of Women's Clubs and the International Federation of Catholic Alumnae, into its 'Open Door' programmes to promote 'better movies', and isolated the demand for governmental supervision of the industry as extremist. A number of events at the end of the decade rendered Hays' coalition of 'responsible groups' increasingly unstable. In late 1929 the leading Episcopalian newspaper, *The Churchman*, began a campaign against the MPPDA culminating in allegations that it had 'retained' officials of the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America in exchange for favourable opinions on movies. These disclosures initiated widespread criticism of the industry throughout the Protestant religious press from 1930 onwards, and the resultant publicity focused the attention of educationalists, parent-teacher groups and other organisations on the issue. A loose alliance between these interests and independent exhibitors hostile to the MPPDA as an instrument of monopoly developed to support legislation linking control of movie content to federal regulation of monopoly practices such as block booking, which exhibitors and reformers argued prohibited community supervision of movie standards.

¹⁹ e.g. Harold J Laski, 'Can Business Be Civilized?', *Harper's*, January 1930.

²⁰ e.g. Harold de Wolf Fuller, 'The Myth of Modern Youth', *North American Review*, June 1929; G Murray, 'The Crisis in Morals', *Harper's*, January 1930; Mary Roberts Rinehart, 'The Chaotic Decade', *Ladies Home Journal*, May 1930.

This argument was taking place amidst a general reaction among white Protestants to the apparent permissiveness of the postwar decade – a reaction evident before 1929, but greatly exacerbated by the Crash. Throughout the culture there were attempts to explain and account for the failure of the system couched in terms seeking to preserve the economic base.¹⁹ Victorian patriarchy strove to reassert itself by identifying the alleged permissiveness of the Jazz Age as the scapegoat for the collapse of the economy.²⁰

The demands for movie reform should thus be seen as part of a broad-

er reaffirmation of traditional patriarchal values at a moment of cultural crisis. This reaffirmation, itself a displaced expression of anxiety for the economic system among the middle class, focused primarily on a concern that the family unit was in danger of disintegrating.²¹ Motherhood, which had 'virtually disappeared from films as the main aspiration for a woman'²², underwent a strenuous revival. Periodicals aimed at middle-class women ran articles extolling the fulfilment to be derived from domesticity, recantations from ex-feminists, and proposals that women who did not need to work should return to the home.²³ The overt concern of movie reform groups with the deleterious effect of movies on children aligned them with the larger trend, while the underlying anxieties of white Protestants regarding their declining control of the culture was reflected in the overt anti-urbanism and implicit anti-Semitism of the campaign.

One consequence of this public concern was an increase in the activity of the State and municipal censor boards, and in the unpredictability of that activity. The industry required a mechanism to safeguard its products from such uncertainties – particularly given the costs of re-editing early sound films. The officials administering the Production Code acknowledged the industry's obligation to defend 'the accepted standards of the American family'²⁴, and 'the sanctity of marriage which . . . is the very foundation of society'²⁵, but much of the early work of the Studio Relations Committee involved monitoring and codifying the activities of the State boards in order to advise the studios about probable deletions. In the first years of its operation the accuracy of its predictions was vital to the establishment of its credibility with the studio heads of production.

The behaviour of the State boards varied between States and over time. Cuts made in movies between 1930 and 1934 show a pattern of increasingly rigorous control; one manifestation of this pattern being the frequency with which officials of the board wrote to Hays or Colonel Jason Joy, the first Director of the SRC, complaining about current standards. One inference from such complaints is that movies were becoming ever more 'daring' in their presentation of sexuality and crime. Such a claim is extremely difficult to measure in any absolute terms, but the impression of a continuous 'decline' of moral standards during the early 1930s is a simplified view of a complex situation in which the general cultural climate was moving towards an increased moral conservatism.

The debate among the institutions of censorship over what the SRC described as 'Social Problem' pictures was centred around the efficacy of narrative recuperation in contradicting scopophilic pleasure, expressed in terms of the extent to which a film's morality was to be assessed on the basis of 'the effect of the whole'²⁶, or on the details of its depiction. Until March 1933, Code officials continued to argue the producers' case that 'pictures that leave a certain final moral lesson' should be permitted a dramatic licence to include 'details that give the audience the opportunity to contrast good and evil'. The censors were not inclined to accept the

²¹ e.g. Floyd H Allport, 'Must We Scrap the Family?' *Harper's*, July 1930.

²² May, *op cit*, p 212.

²³ e.g. Elizabeth Cook, 'The Kitchen-Sink Complex', *Ladies' Home Journal*, September 1931; Worth Tuttle, 'Autobiography of an Ex-Feminist', *Atlantic Monthly*, December 1933; Rita S Halle, 'Do You Need Your Job?', *Good Housekeeping*, September 1932.

²⁴ Lamar Trotti, memo, July 23, 1931, Production Code Administration (PCA) *Back Street* Case File, at the Library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Los Angeles, California.

²⁵ Joseph Breen to Dr James Wingate, then Director of the New York State censor board, May 5, 1933, RKO Production File, *Ann Vickers*, RKO Archives, Los Angeles.

²⁶ Joy to Wingate, February 5, 1931, PCA *Little Caesar* Case File.

²⁷ e.g. Wingate to Joy, February 11, 1931, PCA *Little Caesar* Case File.

²⁸ 'The Reasons Supporting Preamble of the Code', reproduced in Moley, *op cit*, pp 245-6.

²⁹ Gerard B Donnelly, S J, 'An Open Letter to Dr. Wingate', *America*, October 29, 1932, pp 85-6.

³⁰ 'Children and the Movies', editorial reporting an address on the Payne Fund Studies by William H Short, Director of the Motion Picture Research Council, to the Spring 1933 meeting of the Society of Motion Picture Engineers, *America*, May 6, 1933, p 100.

³¹ Wingate to Hays, June 5, 1931, PCA *The Big Brain* Case File.

³² Joy to Breen, December 15, 1931, PCA *Possessed* Case File.

argument.²⁷ Dealing with an already completed product, they were primarily concerned with the elimination of detail; outright rejection of entire films was rare, and invariably began a process of negotiation to discover what deletions would make the film acceptable. While the SRC sought to persuade the censors that the Code provided an adequate alternative to their statutes, most of its negotiations with the studios had to do with ensuring that it could defend a narrative through the interpretation of a Code principle such as 'Sympathy with a person who sins is not the same as sympathy with the sin or crime of which he is guilty.'²⁸

The reform lobby ignored such sophistry by insisting that the manner of presentation led audiences to identify with the sinners and hence sympathise with the sin. 'We feel justified in the complaint that our most competent stars are guilty of endowing unchastity with glamour.'²⁹ Their concern was primarily with detail, because it was the details of behaviour in the movies that children, in particular, remembered and imitated.

*They pay little attention to film morals or retribution, and the idea that a moral at the end cancels out in the child's mind unwholesome material that he has seen earlier in the picture is utterly mistaken.*³⁰

A second issue between the MPPDA and the censor boards was the industry's predilection for the crude but reliable market mechanism of rushing imitations of profitable pictures into production, generating seasonal cycles. When such cycles provoked controversy, the takings of individual movies were undoubtedly increased, but they provided the reform lobby with evidence of the industry's lack of social responsibility. On occasion, Hays invoked the powers of the MPPDA Board of Directors to control production: most notably, in September 1931 when the Board resolved to cease production of gangster pictures.³¹ The solution of one problem, however, provoked another:

*With crime practically denied them, with box-office figures down, with high-pressure methods being employed back home to spur the studios to get in a little more cash, it was almost inevitable that sex, as the nearest thing at hand and pretty generally sure-fire, would be seized upon. It was.*³²

By the end of February 1932, Colonel Joy was complaining to Hays that a cycle of 'kept woman' films, inaugurated in mid-1931 with *Possessed* and *Back Street*, was becoming a major problem. He clearly saw this cycle as comparable to the gangster films.

In the gangster picture the gangster was not a hero . . . And yet, because he was the central figure, because he achieved power, money and a certain notoriety, our critics complained that an inevitable attractiveness resulted . . . They said we killed him off, but that we made him glamorous before we shot him. This is what you are apt to be charged with in this case. While the red-headed woman is a common little creature from over the tracks who steals other women's husbands and who uses her sex attractiveness to do it, she is

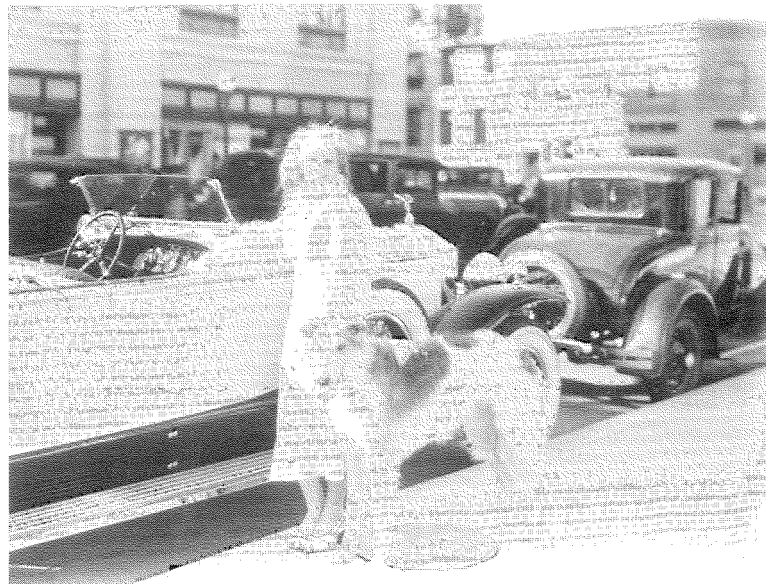
*the central figure and it will be contended that a certain glamor surrounds her. . . . I have a real fear not only of what the censors may do to the picture, but what the public itself will say.*³³

The controversy over the 'kept woman' cycle grew with the release of MGM's *Red-Headed Woman* in June 1932. Written by Anita Loos, it was a comedy in which Jean Harlow progressed up the social and material ladder by a series of affairs.

*Essentially it is an exposition of the theory that the wages of sin are wealth, luxury and social position, the only desiderata being physical charm and the willingness to accept the proffered prices.*³⁴

What distinguished *Red-Headed Woman* from previous examples of the cycle was that the film made comedy out of what had previously been exclusively the material for melodrama and moreover provided a comic rather than a melodramatic conclusion: the film ends with Harlow living in luxury in Paris.

The ammunition it gave to the reform lobby was only part of the problem. In July 1932 Joy wrote despairingly to New York, 'probably right now half of the other companies are trying to figure out ways of topping this particular picture.'³⁵ Paramount's response, orchestrated by its new head of production, Emmanuel Cohen, included the purchase of William Faulkner's *Sanctuary* and the signing of a contract with Mae West. Both actions caused Hays and his officials considerable anxiety because, as Hays told Adolph Zukor, Paramount's behaviour 'disturbs the other companies and the whole inter-company relationship'³⁶. Hays' fear was that the other studios would feel themselves obliged to imitate and outdo each other in competing for the sensational element of the urban trade,



The wages of sin: a well-kept Jean Harlow in *Red-Headed Woman*.

³³ Joy to William Orr, MGM New York, June 14, 1932 (unsent) PCA *Red-Headed Woman* Case File.

³⁴ Martin Quigley, *Decency in Motion Pictures*, New York, Macmillan, 1937, p 38.

³⁵ Joy to Carl Milliken, July 7, 1932, PCA *Red-Headed Woman* Case File.

³⁶ Hays to Adolph Zukor, November 16, 1932, PCA *She Done Him Wrong* Case File.

³⁷ H M Warner to Hays, October 19, 1932, PCA *She Done Him Wrong* Case File.

³⁸ *Baby Face*, Short Story, no author shown (screen credits identify the author as Mark Canfield, one of Darryl Zanuck's pseudonyms), November 9, 1932, 8pp, at the Warner Library of the Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research, Madison, Wisconsin.

³⁹ Haskell, op cit, p 114.

⁴⁰ *Baby Face*, Short Story, op cit, p 1.

⁴¹ quoted by Sumiko Higashi, *Virgins, Vamps and Flappers: The American Silent Movie Heroine*, St Albans, Vermont, Eden Press Women's Publications, 1978, p 61.

⁴² *ibid*, p 59-60.

and in the process destroy the remains of his and the Association's credibility with the 'Open Door' coalition whose support he needed to resist the reform lobby. Protesting the news that Paramount were planning to film West's stage play *Diamond Lil*, Harry Warner implied that his company would, indeed, resort to such tactics.³⁷ Within three weeks, his head of production had produced an outline for *Baby Face*.

III

Darryl Zanuck's short story³⁸ is clearly borrowed from the Harlow film: it refers to the 'psychology of the "red-headed woman"' and similarly tells a story of social climbing through sexual adventure – one which is, however, unrelieved by comedy. It represents an escalation in explicitness from the comparable plots of the working-girl/Cinderella stories of the previous decade (*Love 'em and Leave 'em*, Famous Players-Lasky, 1926; *It*, Famous Players-Lasky, 1927), by transforming the flirtatiousness of the Clara Bow/Louise Brooks flapper into an overt exploitation of female sexuality. *Baby Face*'s predatory allure comes through her capacity to convince men of her innocence as she seduces them, but the mercenary nature of her motivation is explicit: 'all men wanted was her body, so she had given it to the highest bidder.' It also shifts the plot's locale from the site of consumption, a department store, to the site of contemporary financial crisis, a bank.

Escaping from the Depression landscape of a Pennsylvania steel town, *Baby Face* goes to 'the City', where, by way of a series of affairs with her immediate bosses, she progresses up the hierarchy of the Mercantile Trust Company, eventually transferring her affections from one of its managers to his fiancée's father, a director of the bank. When the younger man discovers this liaison, he shoots the director and then commits suicide. After a decent interval in Paris she takes up with the playboy President of the bank, having convinced him of her innocence. In due course she marries him, and he lavishes furs, jewels and securities on her. The bank suffers a collapse for which he is held responsible. He asks her to return his gifts to pay his bail, but she refuses. Just before she sails for Europe, she realises that she really loves him. She returns to discover he has killed himself.

Haskell suggests that in most of her films, Harlow 'was no friend to her own sex'³⁹, but her misogyny was usually relieved by its comic context. *Baby Face* 'hates women'⁴⁰, and in her attitude to men evidences signs of a return to the original Theda Bara Vampire of *A Fool There Was* (Fox, 1915). Bara herself described the character as 'the vengeance of my sex upon its exploiters'⁴¹ while Sumiko Higashi identifies a salient characteristic of Bara's which *Baby Face* shares:

*Although the Vampire represented the full unleashing of the male's sexual instinct, she herself was always in control. She had not enough feeling to lose herself and was coldly calculating instead. It might even be construed that as a supernatural version of the whore, she was frigid.*⁴²



The victim of patriarchy: Lily in her father's beer flat.

Baby Face enacts this role for most of the story, but at the end she succumbs to the conventional fate of the later, less powerful figure of the vamp, losing her power by falling victim to the very weakness she has previously exploited – romantic love, which, as a result of her previous behaviour, is available to her only in its tragic form of loss. The story describes a moral landscape of mutual exploitation, but does so within a narrative firmly constructed around the premise that such behaviour was itself immoral and not to be emulated.

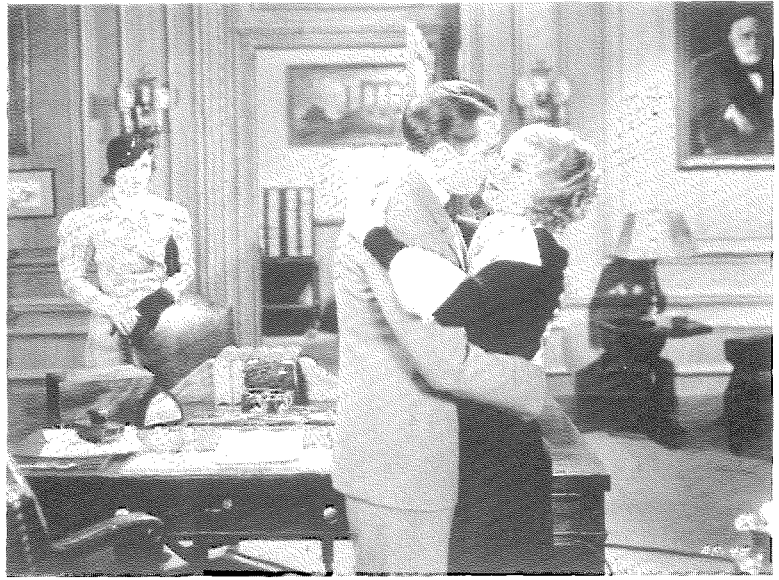
Studio writers Gene Markey and Kathryn Scola produced a story outline on November 21, 1932. It begins with Lily Powers (Baby Face) the explicit victim of patriarchy. Her father exploits her to the point of trading her sexual services to a local politician in exchange for protection for his beer flat. Lily's refusal of the politician's advances is indirectly responsible for her father's death when his still explodes. The writers also introduced a supplementary character, Kragg, the town cobbler, as an alternative father-figure. Their outline⁴³ describes him as

a gnarled, twisted, old German, a cripple – with a bitter resentment of the world . . . he reads Nietzsche, and he is steeped in the philosophy of nature – contempt for the weak . . . Old Kragg is a sort of Mephistopheles. Through this girl he can get his revenge on society.

In a 'brief but poignant scene' after the funeral of her father, he explains to her,

that she has been the victim of men – whereas she should make men her victims. That, just as a man can make use of men to rise in the world – even more easily can she, using her own weapon – sex!

⁴³ *Baby Face*, Story Outline, November 21, 1932, at the Warner Library, Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research.



Lily and the young banker Stevens discovered by his fiancée.

The introduction of Kragg has two, contradictory, effects. It provides a philosophical justification, referred to at several points in the script, for Lily's behaviour towards men. In one of her encounters with Stevens, the younger bank manager, the outline suggests

we establish her tremendous sex attraction for him. (We go as far in this scene as the censors will allow). . . . She resents – and rightfully – his coming to her for only one purpose, after he has spent the evening with his fiancée and his fashionable friends. Moreover, she resents the fiancée – because, with her Nietzschean ideal, she wants to be the one woman. . . . (At this point the audience will sympathize with Lily – because it is made plain that Stevens' only feeling toward her is wanting to sleep with her).

By both Kragg's description and the outline's representation of the male-dominated world, Lily's behaviour is rendered explicable and even at times sympathetic. On the other hand, Kragg's misanthropy is emphasised, while the plot denies everyone, particularly Lily, happiness. The outline depicts a world in which morality is unreliable, suggesting that Lily's 'Nietzschean' assertion of the self is encouraged by such unreliability, but also revealing that these conditions produce only turmoil and personal misery. In most respects, Lily's story mirrors the rise and fall of the gangster: her 'illegal' progress is iconographically charted by the acquisition of clothes and furnishings; her abrupt fall is marked by a moment of self-recognition, although in this case it occurs at the death of the object of her love rather than her own. A connection is made to the economic sphere through the image of Lily's literal progress up 'the gigantic forty-storey skyscraper of the Old Manhattan Trust Company'⁴⁴. Lily's distraction of Trenholm, the bank's director, is identified as being the cause of the bank's failure, which occurs immediately

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p 9.



Moving up: Lily meets the directors of the Old Manhattan Trust.

after their marriage. This sequence of events imposes a causality on the narrative implying a quite different ideological charge to that conventionally identified in gangster movies: less a left-handed version of the American success story with a moralising ending appended for the benefit of the censors than a demonstration of the social failure provoked by the excesses of the previous decade.

Over the next four weeks Markey and Scola wrote a script which broadly followed the story outline. In Lily's rejection of her father, immediately prior to his death, she makes clear the perversity of the nuclear family she has been raised in. Declaring that her mother was right to leave him and is 'better off dead – than livin' with a thing like you!', Lily

turns on him fiercely – all the pent-up bitterness of the years loosened in a sudden flood of rage.

LILY: Yes, I'm a tramp! An' who's to blame?

(looking at him with terrible loathing)

My father! A swell start you gave me! Ever since I was fourteen – what's it been? Men!

(screaming at him)

Dirty, rotten men! An' you're lower than any of 'em!

(her voice breaks hysterically)

I'll hate you as long as I live!⁴⁵

Later, the presentation of an idyllic view of family life becomes the occasion for a restatement of Kragg's philosophy. Alone on Christmas afternoon, Lily sees the family in the apartment next to hers gathered around their Christmas tree, father and children playing together. In her apartment she discovers a present from Kragg: Nietzsche's *Thoughts out of Season*. A passage is marked:

⁴⁵ *Baby Face*, Final Script, December 17, 1932, at the Warner Library, Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research, pp 20-21.

'Face life as you find it – defiantly and unafraid. Waste no energy yearning for the moon. Crush out all sentiment.' . . . She looks up and stares into the fire. . . . Her eyes are somber – bitter. When she came in this Christmas afternoon she was feeling sorry for herself. But now – from her friend, Kragg – this gospel of Nietzsche has brought her back to her hard point of view. Survival of the fittest!⁴⁶

Kragg's function is to supply strength and purpose at precisely those moments when Lily's exclusion from family is announced. He offers an alternative patriarchy not simply in his plot location as substitute father, but explicitly in terms of his critique of the existing social structure as false consciousness.

With Trenholm, the bank president and the only man to see through her 'act' as the innocent victim of male sexual aggression, Lily reverts to conventional sexual mores in refusing to sleep with him until they marry.

*I'm just a little disappointed. . . . I was hoping you **wouldn't** be just like everybody else. . . . Silly of me, wasn't it?⁴⁷*

In these scenes it remains unclear as to how manipulative – of Trenholm and the audience – is Lily's attempt to revise the movie as a romance. When she refuses to return the money, her action is shown as uncertain, as if she is trying to convince herself:

*I have to think about myself! I've gone through a lot to get these things! My life's been miserable and hard! I'm not like other women – all the gentleness and kindness in me has been killed! All I've got are **these** things!*



'There's only one thing I want.' Lily proposes to Trenholm.

(she hugs the case close to her breast)
 Without them I'd be nothing—I'd have to go back to what I was!
 (then with bitter fury)
 No. I won't give them up!⁴⁸

All her subsequent actions demonstrate her inability to enact her philosophy; her inability, in fact, to reject her prescribed role as Woman. The script leaves the process of her self-revelation ambiguous, only confirming it in her final discovery of Trenholm, still alive at Lily's return, in order that he may hear her declaration of love. Lily is finally redeemed/recuperated at the moment that she is also made to suffer through the recognition of her loss; she is accepted into the structures of patriarchy at the same time that she is punished for her earlier transgression of them. Kragg and Nietzsche have conveniently disappeared from the film's final reassertion of patriarchal romance. Lily, who began the movie in humourless imitation of Harlow's Red-Headed Woman, ends it in imitation of Garbo's Susan Lennox.

The script of *Baby Face* shows 'the work that narrative and thematic organization performs to accommodate and recuperate developments like the independent woman stereotype'⁴⁹. In doing so, it kept to the letter of the Production Code, as it was then being interpreted. The script was submitted to the Studio Relations Committee in the second week of December 1932.

... it presents a problem, and a rather serious one from the censorship stand-point. With regard to the Code there is nothing we can find in it which is in violation, despite the fact that the theme is sordid and of a troublesome nature. However, we will do our best to clean it up as much as possible, and the fact that Barbara Stanwyck is destined for the leading role will probably mitigate some of the dangers in view of her sincere and restrained acting.⁵⁰

After some internal discussion at the SRC, Dr James Wingate wrote to Zanuck on January 3, 1933. Remarking that it was hard to judge 'a story of this type' from the script alone, he expressed a naive confidence in Zanuck's supplying 'such moral values as may seem necessary to counterbalance the story, which without them might seem to stress to too great a degree the element of sex'. He reinforced the point by reminding Zanuck that *Red-Headed Woman* had been banned in several Canadian provinces and severely cut by the US State Boards. He suggested Warners emphasise the moral lesson by so revising the ending,

as to indicate that in losing Trenholm she not only loses the one person whom she now loves, but that her money also will be lost. That is, if Lily is shown at the end to be no better off than she was when she left the steel town, you may lessen the chances of drastic censorship action, by thus strengthening the moral value of the story.

The draconian morality which insisted that female sexuality could not be shown to be profitable affected not only the scale of Lily's final punishment, but also her earlier conduct:

⁴⁸ *ibid*, pp 131-132.

⁴⁹ Christine Gledhill, 'Developments in Feminist Film Criticism', in Mary Ann Doane, Patricia Mellencamp and Linda Williams (eds), *Re-Vision: Essays in Feminist Film Criticism*, Los Angeles, American Film Institute, 1984, p 40.

⁵⁰ Wingate to Hays, December 20, 1932, PCA *Baby Face* Case File.

*... you ought to avoid making the facts of each relationship too explicit. This can be done by never really showing through dialogue or action that the man in each case is really paying for the apartment and supplying Lily with money and clothes in return for her affection.*⁵¹

Wingate's letter made further detailed suggestions for deletions or changes in dialogue or action, premised, as SRC recommendations then were, by the comment that such material would be eliminated by State Censor Boards. Infractions of the Code were largely limited to specifically prohibited profanities, and the tone of this letter was typical in being advisory rather than demanding.

Production was completed in February 1933, and Wingate discussed it with Zanuck on February 28. Wingate was particularly concerned about removing elements from the opening scene which implied that Lily's father was selling his daughter to the politician 'for immoral purposes'. Zanuck appeared, for once, to be co-operative, and Wingate emerged from their conference enthusiastic enough to write to Hays that Zanuck appreciated the problem created by sex pictures, and would not make them were it not for pressure from the Sales department who had ordered 20% of their product to be 'women's pictures, which inevitably means sex pictures'⁵².

IV

The early months of 1933 comprised the low point of the industry's fortunes in the Depression. In late January Paramount and RKO were placed in receivership; Sidney Kent, President of Fox, was engaged in a legal battle with several of his board of directors to avoid the same fate. The crisis was primarily one of liquidity, with the companies failing to generate sufficient box-office revenues to sustain payments on the debts they had incurred in expanding in the late 1920s. In the atmosphere of uncertainty that preceded Roosevelt's inauguration, there was widespread fear that the entire industry was virtually bankrupt, and the immediate crisis deepened with the declaration of a bank holiday on March 5. Box-office receipts were reported to have fallen by 45%⁵³, and weekly attendance was estimated to be as low as 28 million, a figure which supplied only 20% of the income needed to defray weekly production costs⁵⁴.

The possibility of imminent economic collapse was not, however, the only problem the industry faced in early March. The exact nature of Roosevelt's proposals for government control of industry were not as yet clear, but bills hostile to the monopoly power of the major companies were to be presented to Congress, including a proposal by Representative Sirovich of New York for a wide-ranging Congressional investigation of the industry. State and municipal legislatures throughout the country were proposing a variety of local taxes on the movies as a readily available source of income. Hollywood's image of extravagance made it

⁵¹ Wingate to Zanuck, January 3, 1933, PCA *Baby Face* Case File.

⁵² Wingate to Hays, February 28, 1933, PCA *Baby Face* Case File.

⁵³ *Time*, March 20, 1933, p 41.

⁵⁴ C F Morgan, 'Climax of the Movie Tragedy Approaches', *Magazine of Wall Street*, April 15, 1933, p 670.

an acutely vulnerable financial target under such circumstances, and the reform lobby's growing ability to gain press coverage substantially increased that vulnerability. The first synopses of the Payne Fund Studies had been serialised in the September, October and November 1932 issues of *McCall's*, and the claim that they would provide irrefutable scientific evidence of the detrimental effect of movies on children added considerably to the demands for governmental control.

The behaviour of the new Congress, and the extent to which it might regard such proposals sympathetically, was highly uncertain. There was a not unfounded fear that new members might believe that 'riding the movies is a profitable and tenable political position'⁵⁵, given the combination of moral disapproval occasioned by reports of the industry's financial dealings⁵⁶ and the untimely success of Mae West's first film, *She Done Him Wrong*. The election of Roosevelt meant that Hays, who had supervised Warren Harding's Presidential campaign in 1920, had lost his personal contacts with the administration; since the election there had been widespread rumours that he would be replaced by a Democrat. To add to the sense of alarm, there were reports that representatives of the various censor boards were planning a conference designed to produce a uniform policy on censorship.⁵⁷ Equally serious was the discontented presence in Hollywood of Martin Quigley, owner of *Motion Picture Herald*, instigator of the Production Code and a key figure in Hays' vital alliance with Catholic organisations.

*Q. is very much discouraged about the whole Code business. He feels that our folks here . . . continue to ignore it . . . He feels that the staff which succeeded Col. Joy is not a good one. . . I never saw him so down in the mouth about anything.*⁵⁸

Quigley's disaffection might have resulted in Catholic withdrawal from co-operation with the MPPDA, and that in turn might have led to a legislative victory for the Protestant-dominated reform groups.

An emergency meeting of the MPPDA Board of Directors was held on the evening of March 5, primarily to consider measures to deal with the bank holiday. Hays, however, made it clear that more than economic action was required to deal with the crisis. A more rigid enforcement of the Code, he argued, was absolutely necessary if the industry was to maintain any public sympathy, and stand any chance of resisting the pressure for federal intervention not merely over its content policies, but also over its financial operations. He persuaded the Board of Directors to sign a Reaffirmation of Objectives that stated

Not only is a continuous supply of motion picture entertainment doubly essential in these times of confusion and distress, but the tendency toward confused thinking and slackening of standards everywhere re-emphasizes the importance of the progressively effective process of self-discipline by which the moral and artistic standards of motion picture production have been steadily raised during the past eleven years. . . It is inevitable that during a period such as we now face, disintegrating influences should threaten the

⁵⁵ Lupton A Wilkinson to Hays, October 29, 1932, Will H Hays Archive, Department of Special Collections, Indiana State Library, Indianapolis.

⁵⁶ *Upton Sinclair Presents William Fox* was published in early 1933, and free copies were distributed to every member of the new Congress.

⁵⁷ Richmond, Virginia, *Times-Dispatch*, February 7, 1933.

⁵⁸ Breen to Hays, March 2, 1933, Hays Archive.

⁵⁹ Reaffirmation of the Members of the MPPDA, signed March 7, 1933, quoted in Moley, *op cit*, pp 250-251.

⁶⁰ Hays to Wingate, March 10, 1933, 1933 Production Code File, Motion Picture Association of America Archive, New York.

⁶¹ 1933 Production Code File, MPAA Archive.

⁶² *Motion Picture Herald*, April 29, 1933, p 9.

*standards of production, standards of quality, standards of business practice, built up and maintained by cooperation. . . . We realize the fact that whether American industry will be rebuilt after the depression on a higher or lower plane depends entirely upon the maintenance or destruction of the higher business standards developed through years of cooperative effort.*⁵⁹

The Reaffirmation became the implement with which Hays began to reorganise the Code administration. It was not made public at the time, because it would amount to a public acknowledgement that the industry had violated the Code, but Hays immediately wrote to Wingate instructing him to tighten up the application of the Code not only on new scripts but also on pictures in production and those about to be finished.⁶⁰ Joe Breen, who had previously been supervising the application of the Advertising Code, was drafted in to assist Wingate where necessary. At the same time, company heads wrote to their heads of production in Hollywood, informing them of the new policy.

During March Hays constructed a five-point programme for the 'organized solution on a co-operative scale of many of the problems of readjustment', covering ways in which the MPPDA member companies could pool facilities and hence reduce costs at the same time that they strengthened their operational hold on the industry. The Association's Annual Meeting on March 27 ratified the programme, although one of its elements, a temporary 25-50% salary cut throughout the industry to meet the immediate cash crisis, had provoked strike threats by the Hollywood craft unions. The crisis had been somewhat alleviated by the partial restoration of confidence by the end of the month, and on April 6 Hays and the entire MPPDA Board entrained for California to put the production branch straight on the need for stringent economies and a more vigorous application of the Code. In addressing the producers on April 20, Hays was insistent:

*The failure to maintain the clear promises the industry has made to the public for the protection of American family standards in motion picture theatres will jeopardize any permanent investment in the motion picture industry. . . . The result most disastrous of the violations is the legislative retaliation. . . . peaking in this Sirovich investigation, the way they get sore because of what is in the pictures, in the advertising, and they take it out on us in this tax and other confiscatory measures. . . . To meet this emergency, and as a prime matter of economy and cost reduction, we have found it necessary to reaffirm our resolutions and strictly enforce them.*⁶¹

If the producers ignored his 'clean up' campaign, Hays threatened, 'their superiors in New York would find a group who would obey orders'⁶². If the studios continued to evade the SRC, he would take the issue first to the company heads in New York, and then to the bankers and stockholders, and finally to the public. He insisted that the release of one censorable picture

could force the entire Industry to submit to Federal censorship, which would mean – to use his own words – that 'the Industry would be placed in a straight

jacket so far as censorship is concerned—and only be able to produce “Jack and the Bean Stalks” and fairy tales.’ . . . they are going to be more rigid with the enforcement of the Code. This attitude is already evidenced in the letters we are now receiving from them on scripts. Prior to this time, we were told ‘it is recommended, etc.’, but recently letters definitely state, ‘it is inadmissible, etc.’ or something equally definite.⁶³

Although little of this action was made public, the firmness of Hays’ stance was communicated to Congressmen through the MPPDA’S highly efficient lobby operation in Washington⁶⁴, and undoubtedly played a significant part in defeating the Sirovich resolution on May 12.

V

The first two victims of the new policy were *The Story of Temple Drake* and *Baby Face*, both of which completed production in late February. Negotiations between Wingate and Zanuck during March had led to some further deletions in the Warners film, and a ‘more wholesome and a brighter finish’⁶⁵ was added, in which the lovers were reconciled. However, an alarm bell had obviously been sounded by Wingate’s mentioning that the cobbler preaches to Stanwyck ‘the philosophy of Nietzsche to the effect that she should use the power that she has over men to rise in the world’⁶⁶. By the end of March the revised film had arrived in New York, where it was unofficially rejected by the New York Censor Board. On April 1, Hays received an assurance from Harry Warner that, in accordance with the Reaffirmation, no attempt would be made to release the film until further consultations over it had taken place.⁶⁷

Modifications to *Baby Face* needed to go beyond simply the deletion of material or the substitution of ‘protection shots’, which most studios were by 1933 in the habit of taking on potentially dubious sequences. To bring it within the ‘spirit of the Code’, new scenes supplying ‘the voice of morality’ were required, and their provision was complicated by the fact that Stanwyck was unavailable for retakes. The solution, encapsulated in a letter Wingate sent Jack Warner on May 11, was actually worked out by Joe Breen, who already occupied an important role in the censorship procedure.

. . . the greatest lack of the picture now . . . is the fact that nowhere . . . is the heroine denounced for her brazen method of using men to promote herself financially. . . . This may seem to create the impression that her mode of living and course of action are condoned. . . . we would suggest an attempt to use the cobbler in a few added scenes as the spokesman of morality.⁶⁸

Breen was able to do what Wingate apparently could not: provide a practical solution to the studio’s problem, and protect its investment. Wingate’s universal unpopularity with the studio heads largely derived from his merely proposing deletions rather than suggesting improvements. The SRC, in the person of Hays and Wingate, insisted that the

⁶³ Harry Zehner, memo to producers and writers, May 26, 1933, in Universal Studios Censorship file, USC Special Collections Box 778.

⁶⁴ cf John Callan O’Laughlin to Hays, April 10, 1933. Hays Archive.

⁶⁵ Zanuck to Wingate, March 29, 1933, PCA *Baby Face* Case File.

⁶⁶ Wingate to Hays, March 2, 1933, PCA *Baby Face* Case File.

⁶⁷ Hays to Harry Warner, April 14, 1933, PCA *Baby Face* Case File.

⁶⁸ Wingate to J L Warner, May 11, 1933, *Baby Face* Case File. Although the letter was signed by Wingate, it was undoubtedly written by Breen. All studio correspondence from the SRC was signed by its Director, but it was normal practice for letters to be written by officers.

⁶⁹ *Baby Face*, Final Script, pp 26-27.

⁷⁰ Dialogue transcribed from print of *Baby Face* at the Warner Library, Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research. See also H J McCord to Wingate, May 19, 1933, PCA *Baby Face* Case File.

⁷¹ Wingate to J L Warner, May 11, 1933, PCA *Baby Face* Case File.

⁷² Transcribed from print at Warner Library, Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research. See also H J McCord to Wingate, May 13, 1933, PCA *Baby Face* Case File.

⁷³ Wingate to Hays, May 20, 1933, PCA *Baby Face* Case File.

cobbler as Nietzschean philosopher of the immoral way be removed from the film. The SRC, in the person of Breen, put him back in with new dialogue. His initial advice:

*... A woman – young, beautiful – like you – can get anything she wants in the world! Because you have power over men! ... But you must use men, not let them use you! You must be a master, not a slave! Look! Here! Nietzsche says ‘All life, no matter how we idealize it, is nothing more or less than exploitation!’ That’s what I’m telling you! Exploit yourself! Go to some big city where you can find opportunities ... Be strong – Defiant! Use men – to get the things you want!*⁶⁹

became:

*... A woman – young, beautiful – like you, can get anything she wants in the world! But there is the right and wrong way – remember the price of the wrong way is too great. Go to some big city where you will find opportunities. But don’t let people mislead you, you must be a master, not a slave. Keep clean, be strong – defiant! And you will be a success.*⁷⁰

Breen suggested that the book Kragg sends Lily should be *Self Help*, ‘because the title lends itself to broad interpretation’.⁷¹ While this suggestion was not taken up, his idea of substituting the quotation with a letter was. It read:

*Dear Lily; from your letters I can tell that my advice was for nothing. You have chosen the wrong way. You are still a coward. Life will defeat you unless you fight back and regain your self-respect. I send you this book hoping that you will allow it to guide you right.*⁷²

All this remodelling was completed in a week, and on May 20 Wingate wrote to Hays

*As the picture appears now there is no evidence of any Nietzsche philosophy. On the other hand, as you will note, all the advice of the cobbler has been on the side of morality. ... The affair with the office boy is cut in such a manner that he has no affair with her. All the men with whom she has affairs come to destruction. One loses his job, one is shot, another shoots himself, etc. The end of the picture has been changed so that it now closes with a picture of the board of directors showing that all of Lily’s money had been repaid to the bank and that they haven’t a cent and that Trenholm, the former president of the bank is working as a laborer in the steel mills.*⁷³

On June 8, Breen wrote to Hays that the film now conformed to the Production Code, and suggested that Hays take the opportunity to congratulate the studio on

the splendid spirit of helpfulness which the Warners have displayed in this matter and the promptness with which they set about to clean up a very bad picture and succeeded very well.

Nevertheless, Breen reminded Hays the film's theme was still questionable and 'suggests a kind, or type, of picture which ought not to be encouraged'⁷⁴. His endorsement did not, in any case, save the picture from minor cuts of dialogue and action by State Censor Boards, nor from a complete ban by five of the eight Canadian States.

VI

There is nothing particularly exceptional about what happened to *Baby Face*. *Temple Drake* and other 'kept woman' pictures in production at the time were subjected to comparable treatment, and a year later the same fate befell a number of other films caught between two dispensations of the Code, including Mae West's *It Ain't No Sin*. The example of *Baby Face* does, however, serve to illustrate the extent of Code activity at an earlier period, where it is commonly supposed that little censorship activity took place. It also provides a case-study of the balance between elements in the Code's moral accountancy. The narrative always presented a patriarchal moral, in which Lily's aberrant expression of her sexuality resulted in her punishment. The crime of which the narrative found her guilty was patricide, but the form of her punishment was changed from what had previously been the melodramatic fate of characters in comparable positions—deprivation, denial and exclusion from society—to a more inclusive and perverse form of patriarchal revenge, by which she was returned to the world from which she had attempted to escape.

In this transformation, the character of Kragg retained the same narrative function as donor, but his ideological role shifted from that of alternative patriarch to true patriarch, to whose moral world Lily is returned at the film's conclusion. Where the script version offered only a pessimistic critique of the social consequences of the culture of consumption, the film's ending provided a reassertion of traditional Protestant values, in which Lily and Trenholm were announced to be 'working out their happiness together'⁷⁵. The realignment of Kragg's role to a point where, at the end of the movie, he becomes ideologically indistinguishable from the Director of the Bank who decrees Trenholm's return to the steel town, locates the film in an ideological context which Nick Roddick describes as

a fundamentally just society which offered the individual, even under the most extreme circumstances, the chance to re-establish himself (rarely, if ever, herself)

The fact that the final version of the film was located in that context, however, has less to do with 'the studio's ideological commitment... to the nascent policies of the New Deal', as Roddick argues⁷⁶, than to external pressures on the studio and the industry to revise their product into a closer conformity with the expected norms of a culture in recession. What makes *Baby Face* so appropriate an example of the processes of

⁷⁴ Breen to Hays, June 8, 1933, PCA *Baby Face* Case File.

⁷⁵ Dialogue transcribed from print of *Baby Face* at the Warner Library, Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research, my italics.

⁷⁶ Nick Roddick, *A New Deal in Entertainment: Warner Brothers in the 1930s*, London, British Film Institute, 1983, p. 126.

⁷⁷ Gerard B Donnelly, SJ, 'An Open Letter to Dr. Wingate', *America*, October 29, 1932, pp 85-86.

⁷⁸ Internal MPPDA memorandum, Ray Norr to Hays, October 18, 1933, 1933 Production Code File, MPAA Archive.

ideological repression is the way in which the cinematic inverts the causality of the extra-cinematic: the Crash, represented by the failure of the bank, is caused – which is to say, explained – by Lily's effect on men. The film exposes the contradictions inherent in patriarchy's bifurcated representation of woman, by which she is narratively punished for her existence as a spectacle of desire: it is accidental (in that it resulted from Stanwyck's unavailability for retakes), but it is entirely appropriate to the movie's optical politics that the revised ending cannot show Lily in the prison of working class domesticity to which it has returned her.

Father Gerard Donnelly, SJ, editor of the Catholic periodical *America* and an influential figure in the organisation of the Legion of Decency, rejected the theories of more extreme critics of the movies which historians have subsequently adopted when he commented that

*it would be absurd to claim that producers are deliberately trying to destroy the traditional teachings of the pulpit.*⁷⁷

The movies of the early Depression represented the crisis of the period, but they did so within the parameters of their own systems of convention, which were themselves products of the industry's complex interaction with the culture and economy of which it was a dynamic part. Those conventions revealed the crisis in patriarchal ideology which accompanied the crisis in the institutions of capitalism. The extent to which patriarchy's contradictions were exposed was indicated by a Hays Office comment on Mae West:

*The very man who will guffaw at Mae West's performance as a reminder of the ribald days of his past will resent her effect upon the young, when his daughter imitates the Mae West wiggle before her boyfriends and mouths 'Come up and see me sometime'.*⁷⁸

In an economic moment when the possibilities for consumption were sharply restricted, the contradictions contained within this image of woman became more apparent than they had been during its formulation over the previous decade. The image of fetishised sexuality as consumerist pleasure became more threatening for a culture in recession, and the potential subversiveness of the image brought forth louder calls for its repression. In that sense it may be argued that the campaign to repress the image of female sexuality was concerned with its threatened exposure of the contradictions within patriarchal capitalism, but the contradiction arose not around the representation of independent woman – a figure who was continuously contained, recuperated and repressed within narrative – but around the representation of woman as an object of consumption/desire. The Depression interrupted the smooth development of a culture of consumption, and caused a temporary reconsideration of the iconography it had promulgated. The demand for the imposition of censorship was a rebellion against images of consumption, and it gained public credibility because those images had become too detached from the available reality. A recurrent criticism of both Hollywood and

the previous decade was that they were guilty of the sin of excess. In the widespread criticism of Hollywood's 'excessive' salaries, the idols of consumption were represented as objects of idolatry to be condemned and punished. The 'kept woman' cycle was a vehicle for this condemnation, in two senses: it provided a target for it, and it also, with increasing vehemence, enacted it in the punishments it meted out to its heroines. To read *Baby Face* as an account of the conflicts of the previous decade is consistent with its existence as a text and an historical object. Judging whether audiences perceived it in these terms is rather more difficult because relatively few people were given the opportunity to see the film. Its reputation within the industry ensured a limited release, and, in common with the majority of films which provoked controversy during this period, it was prohibited from reissue in February 1935.

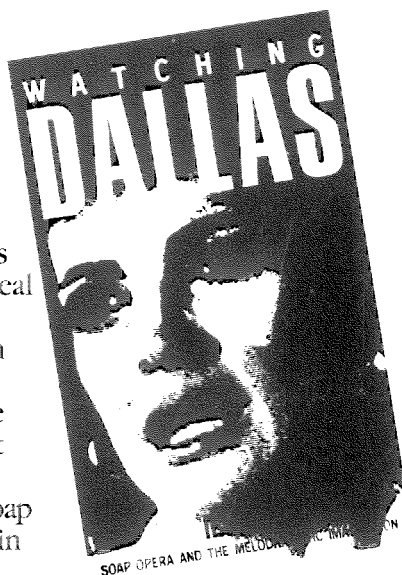
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BRITISH BROADCASTING AND IRELAND

47

BY LIZ CURTIS

The outcry in the summer of 1985 over the banning of the BBC's *Real Lives* programme, *At the Edge of the Union*, about two Derry politicians, republican Martin McGuinness and loyalist Gregory Campbell, highlighted in a particularly dramatic way the question of British media coverage (or non-coverage) of the political situation in the North of Ireland.

There was little new about the ban – it was just one more episode in a shameful and repetitive story. The reason it provoked journalists into an unprecedented nation-and-a-half-wide strike was that this time the censorship procedure was so swift, so surgical and above all so public. The film had been completed and had been publicised at length in the *Radio Times* when the *Sunday Times* alerted the politicians to it on July 28. Next day the Home Secretary demanded that the BBC ban it, and the gutter press began howling for censorship. On the Tuesday the BBC's Governors caved in. It all took just three days.

British government attitudes

Up until British troops went onto the streets of Derry and Belfast in August 1969, unionist politicians policed the radio and television coverage of Ireland. Together with the usually compliant broadcasting chiefs, they ensured, till the end of 1968, that virtually no criticism of their unjust, anachronistic 'province' reached the airwaves.

Then for a few months British politicians tried to press the unionist regime towards reform, and the media praised the civil rights movement, treating people like Bernadette Devlin as celebrities. But when British strategy changed, pushing ever greater numbers of British troops into a highly aggressive role in nationalist areas, the media, especially the right-wing press,

became increasingly hostile to the nationalist community. The results were sometimes ludicrous, as in this *Daily Sketch* report in June 1970: 'Behind the swirling haze of CS gas, the croak of the frog summons Londonderry to riot It moves from street battle to street battle pouring out a continuous stream of hate, vilification and obscenities.'

The big assaults by British politicians and newspapers (and the inevitable *Mary Whitehouse*) against radio and television coverage began in 1971. The introduction of internment without trial was accompanied by torture of detainees and widespread brutality by British soldiers on the streets – they killed 11 civilians on August 9 alone, the day internment was introduced. Reports of such atrocities on radio and television infuriated Tory MPs, who demanded 'patriotic censorship', and Home Secretary Reginald Maudling, who summoned the chairpersons of the BBC and Independent Television Authority (the body that oversaw the commercial stations, forerunner of the Independent Broadcasting Authority).

Christopher Chataway, the minister responsible for broadcasting, publicly lectured the broadcasters not to treat the 'soldier' and 'murderer' as moral equals. Lord Hill, chair of the BBC Governors, agreed: 'The BBC and its staff abhor the terrorism of the IRA [Irish Republican Army] and report their campaign of murder with revulsion . . . as between the British army and the gunmen, the BBC is not and cannot be impartial.'

Since the start of internment, the BBC had censored numerous items including an in-depth programme on the IRA, an interview with released detainee Michael Farrell, and a report on the nationalist 'Alternative Parliament', as well as news of several incidents showing the British army in a bad light. Lord Hill's statement, which was soon echoed by the

48 Independent Television Authority, formalised the situation, publicly committing the BBC to a biased and selective treatment of events in the North, in which the views and experiences of a large part of the nationalist community were taboo.

The Vietnam parallel

The particular fear of the British establishment at the time was that critical coverage of the British army would sap morale in the military and back home. Lieutenant-Colonel 'Mad Mitch' Mitchell, Tory MP and veteran of earlier colonial wars, for instance, accused the BBC of 'contributing towards IRA objectives by undermining the will of the home population to fight in Ulster.'

The fear was real. An opinion poll in the *Daily Mail* that September showed that 59% of British people wanted the troops brought home. Politicians and pundits invoked the alarming example of American TV coverage of the war in Vietnam, which was being widely blamed (or credited, depending on your viewpoint) for the enormous growth of the anti-war movement.

The American authorities effectively spiked the anti-war movement not by censoring TV coverage, but by 'Vietnamising' the war, taking 'our boys' out of the front line (thus decreasing the number of coffins on the homeward bound planes) and replacing them with locally recruited forces. In the mid-seventies, the British began to follow the same policy, 'Ulsterisation', in the Six Counties, and the decline in the number of British troops was accompanied by a decline in British public interest. (The Royal Ulster Constabulary and Ulster Defence Regiment, after all, are not considered by the British to be 'their boys', and their deaths have little impact in Britain.)

In effect, the Ulsterisation of the 'security' situation, plus British governments' abandonment of the attempts at solutions with an 'Irish dimension', helped to promote the Ulsterisation of information. From about 1974, following the collapse of Sunningdale, Ireland dropped out of the British headlines. Since then, it has featured prominently only when British politicians wanted to promote a particular development—such as the 'peace people' of 1976—or when the scale of republican resistance has

made it impossible for the British media to ignore the situation.

During the 1981 hunger strike, for instance, when Mrs Thatcher and others attacked the television companies for the amount of coverage given to the hunger strikers' funerals, the BBC's then Director-General Sir Ian Trethowan defended his organisation by saying, 'The irritation of many viewers at being shown so much about Sands [hunger striking IRA prisoner and MP Bobby Sands] was entirely understandable, but however much they disliked it, the Sands affair became a major international event which had to be reported to the British public.'

Within the North, however, there is an abundance of information from a variety of political perspectives. The radio and television companies look at events from a pro-British/ Alliance Party/middle-class perspective. But they produce much more news and analysis of Six County politics, including statements from and interviews with Sinn Féin, and examinations of 'sensitive' issues such as plastic bullets, than do the British national media. Indeed, the Six County broadcasting companies have little alternative but to report fairly fully, because otherwise they would have no credibility with their audience, which is also receiving news from other sources, including local papers and, importantly, direct experience.

Internal censorship

The quality and quantity of television coverage of the North has also been reduced by the stringent internal censorship procedures operated by the television companies since at least 1971. These special rules for covering Ireland are laid down in the BBC's handbook for journalists, the *News and Current Affairs Index*, under the heading 'Coverage of Matters Affecting Northern Ireland', and in the Independent Broadcasting Authority's *Guidelines* handbook for the commercial broadcasting companies.

The system, which so far applies to no other political issue, is often called 'reference upwards' or 'managerial censorship'. Basically this means that top bureaucrats keep close control over all programmes dealing with Ireland. Reporters and producers, overwhelmingly white, male and middle-class (and, in the BBC, vetted by MI5 to

weed out progressives), are normally trusted to make the 'right decisions'. But when it comes to Ireland no one is trusted.

Producers, editors and reporters have to 'refer up' all ideas for programmes on Ireland to top management, including, in the BBC, the Controller Northern Ireland, and have to continue to consult top management during the making of the programme. In ITV (Independent Television) programmes have to be referred to the management of the television company concerned, and then to the Independent Broadcasting Authority. In both BBC and ITV, programmes which are 'sensitive' – mainly those critical of the British authorities or giving time to republican politics – have to be viewed by top officials before transmission. The BBC's rules at the time of the *Real Lives* drama did not require reference to the Board of Governors, but the governors' action in banning that film raised the fear that reference to them would in future become the norm, with further stifling effects on the coverage.

In the course of this 'reference upwards' procedure, numerous programmes or items have been banned, cut, delayed or altered. From 1971 onwards, nearly 50 programmes are known to have been affected. They include current affairs programmes, plays and even pop music: in 1981 the BBC banned the Police rock group's video for their single *Invisible Sun*, which showed Six County street scenes of graffiti, youths, and British soldiers, from *Top of the Pops*. They include historical documentaries, such as Kenneth Griffith's film on Michael Collins banned by the commercial network in 1973; portraits of the lives of nationalist people, such as a film about the Short Strand district of Belfast banned by the BBC in 1977; plays and documentaries dealing with torture and other unsavoury British activities; and, perhaps not surprisingly, a projected programme for the BBC's 'access' slot, *Open Door*, which was to have examined British media coverage of Ireland!

The 'reference upwards' procedure, and the knowledge that Ireland spells trouble, also acts as a deterrent to career-conscious TV journalists, many of whom are especially vulnerable because they are employed on short-term contracts. As has been said, for every programme that gets banned, there are probably 20 that are never made in the first place.

Republican interviews

As well as the general 'reference up' rules, there are extra-tight rules for interviews with members of 'terrorist organisations' – which in practice means banned organisations – and with people 'who are or may be associated with such organisations'. Since the UDA (Ulster Defence Association), the largest loyalist paramilitary group, is legal (as is, of course, the paramilitary wing of the British government), these rules mainly restrict access to republican organisations. In the BBC, reporters wishing to interview members of the IRA or INLA (Irish National Liberation Army) have to ask permission of the Director-General both before doing the interview and before transmission. Reporters in the commercial companies have to consult their top management, who in turn have to ask permission of the Independent Broadcasting Authority.

Since 1979 there have been no interviews with spokespersons for the IRA and INLA, and no film of IRA or INLA members in action. (The only partial exception was a *Panorama* film about the issue of extradition, shown in 1982, which featured a number of people living in the 26 counties who had escaped extradition by claiming membership of the IRA or INLA.)

This *de facto* total ban was the product of major rows over two BBC projects in 1979. In July an interview with an INLA spokesperson, transmitted by *Tonight*, provoked Mrs Thatcher (backed by Labour's Merlyn Rees) into 'lashing' and 'blasting' the BBC over its 'appalling error', as the papers put it. Then in November a planned film by *Panorama* on the IRA sank without trace after news leaked out that the team had filmed an IRA roadblock in the County Tyrone village of Carrickmore, sending Mrs Thatcher once more into apoplexy and reducing the BBC Governors to 'giving their customary imitation of chickens running around with their heads cut off', as a BBC trade union journal put it. The police demanded – and got – the film from the BBC. The BBC management sacked the editor of *Panorama* from his post: he was reinstated after National Union of Journalist branches threatened a strike. The Attorney-General, Sir Michael Havers, investigated both the INLA interview and the Carrickmore film,

50 and reported that there was enough evidence to prosecute the journalists under Section 11 of the Prevention of Terrorism Act for 'withholding information'. He refrained from doing so, probably because a furore about press freedom would have ensued, but the threat remained.

'Balance' and hostile interviews

In addition to the rules on procedures, there are conventions, which have been spelled out by BBC executives over the years, as to the content and character of programmes on Ireland. The first is that programmes featuring nationalist or republican views must also include the opposite view. So while British or unionist politicians, or pro-British figures such as Gerry Fitt, can appear unopposed, Sinn Féin representatives must be 'balanced' by people expressing the pro-British or unionist viewpoint.

The second convention is that all republican interviewees – whether members of military or political organisations – must be treated as 'hostile witnesses'. This means that the interviewee is questioned aggressively, often with frequent interruptions. The interviewer repeatedly challenges or even contradicts statements made by the interviewee. Where the interview is part of a film, it is often presented in a hostile context. Television films about Sinn Féin MP Gerry Adams, for example, are usually done in this style.

These conventions, together with the 'reference up' procedures, are the way the BBC ensures that the coverage is moulded to fit its pro-British, anti-republican stance. In 1980 Richard Francis, a senior BBC executive, using words which were echoed time and again during the *Real Lives* uproar in 1985, wrote: 'Nobody involved in the journalistic coverage of terrorism is other than sympathetic to the victims or repelled by the perpetrators of terrorist crimes.... Not only do they get very much less coverage than those who pursue their aims legitimately, but the very manner and tone that our reporters adopt makes our moral position quite plain.'

The BBC governors objected to the *Real Lives* film because in their view it was not sufficiently anti-republican. The London *Times* reported on August 3, 1985: 'They felt the portrayal of Mr Martin McGuinness, widely believed to be the Provisional IRA chief of staff, dandling a baby

on his knee in his front room while being sympathetically interviewed, was disturbing.

'The clinching factor was that there were no clips of the consequences of IRA violence cut into the interview to illustrate the background to Mr McGuinness' apparently moderately expressed views. The only violence depicted were scenes of Royal Ulster Constabulary policemen clubbing Republican demonstrators with batons.'

In September 1985 the BBC announced that the film would, after all, be shown, but with alterations. These changes accommodated the governors' criticisms: a caption on Sinn Féin's recent election successes would be amended to state that they won 'only' 12% of the votes cast, and the film would now include gruesome footage of the aftermath of the IRA's 'Bloody Friday' bombings in 1972. There was, of course, to be no additional material on killings by British forces or loyalists, who together have been responsible for some 38% of the deaths since 1969, nor on the political and social violence suffered by nationalists under the present political set-up.

The British way of censorship

Way back in 1972, a broadcasting union official complained to the BBC that the 'checks and balances' on Irish coverage 'were becoming as effective as censorship, probably more effective because they were not much known outside the circles immediately involved, were superficially merely an intensification of normal safeguards, and were too vague and distant a target for public criticism.'

This hidden censorship has been a classic British solution to the problem of how to censor without appearing to do so. Successive British governments have refrained from bringing in direct censorship along the lines of Section 31 of the South of Ireland's Broadcasting Act, under which any coverage of republican organisations is banned. This option is available in existing British law, but the establishment fears – justifiably, as the international outcry over the *Real Lives* ban proved – the impact of such a step on Britain's reputation as a 'haven of free speech'.

When in 1971 rampant right-wingers proposed formal censorship, operated either by the state or by the broadcasting companies, BBC chiefs

rejected this mainly on the grounds that it would undermine their credibility. Instead, they said, they were maintaining 'a scrupulous editorial watch' on programmes on Ireland. Sections of the military shared this view, as did the London *Times*, which argued that censorship would help the IRA and 'would mean that no fact, no assessment offered by British television, radio or newspapers would be free of the taint that it had been presented under government supervision.'

At the start of 1972 Home Secretary Reginald Maudling tried to stop a BBC talk-in called *The Question of Ulster* by publicly telling the BBC that the show, if transmitted, 'could do serious harm'. The pressure was so blatant that the BBC felt obliged to go ahead with the programme since, as the *Financial Times* observed, 'as an independent public corporation it could not be seen to give in to political pressure.'

Since then, the politicians have kept the broadcasters under control by less direct pressure. Some have made private requests to senior executives to alter planned programmes (a method advocated by former Labour Home Secretary Merlyn Rees). Others, aided by the press, have created huge public uproars whenever the television companies overstepped the mark. Labour's former Northern Ireland Secretary Roy Mason was a leading proponent of this bullying approach, as is the present Prime Minister Mrs Thatcher.

Not surprisingly, both the BBC and the IBA have repeatedly responded to political pressure by tightening up their internal censorship procedures. Both the BBC and the commercial TV network are very susceptible to government blandishments. The BBC's Governors, who appoint the Director-General, are government appointees, as are the members of the Independent Broadcasting Authority. The BBC's just-retired 'National Governor for Northern Ireland', appointed by Merlyn Rees, was Lady Faulkner, unionist and widow of former Northern Ireland Prime Minister Brian Faulkner, who is being replaced by Dr James Kincade, another unionist. The IBA's 'member for Northern Ireland' is Mrs Jill McIvor, wife of Basil, another former unionist member of Stormont. (Jill McIvor is also a member, with special responsibility for Northern Ireland, of the panel appointed by the present Home Secretary Douglas Hurd to advise him on the selection of groups to be granted community radio licences.)

Further, the government decides the size of the BBC licence fee—and the Tories are threatening to force the BBC to accept commercials—while the IBA awards the franchises to the 'independent' TV companies, which are therefore anxious to avoid trouble.

Real Lives

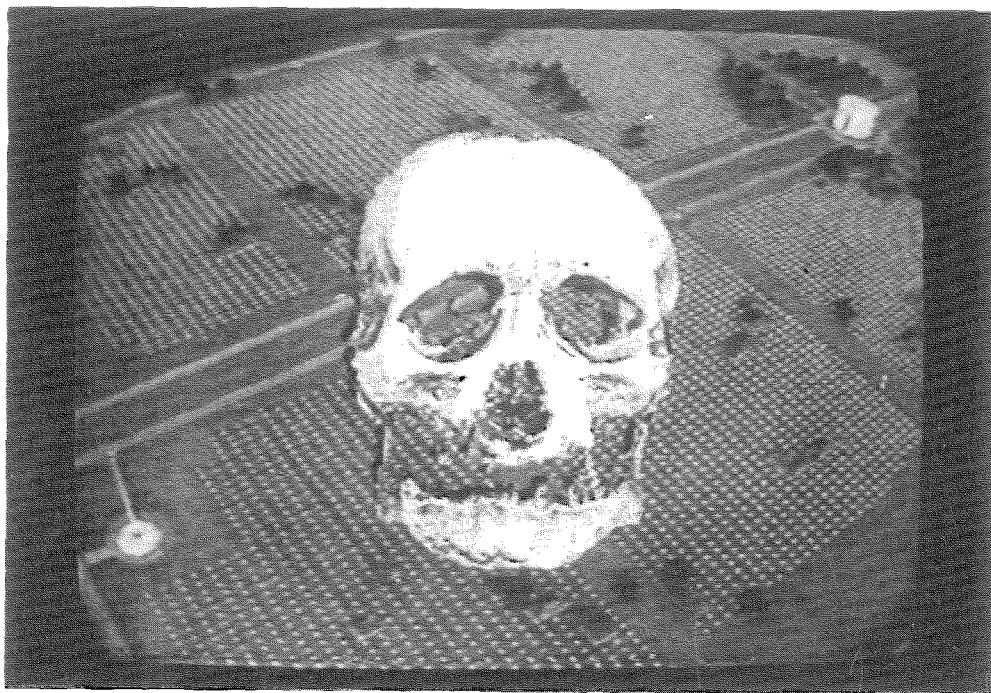
The *Real Lives* drama was caused in part because then Home Secretary Leon Brittan and the chairman of the BBC Governors, Thatcherite appointee Stuart Young, apparently did not understand the roles they were supposed to play in the charade. As a result, to put it bluntly, they blew it, causing consternation on every side. 'BBC World Service derided abroad as a state organ', announced the London *Times*, while the *Financial Times* mourned: 'The next time an enterprising BBC team produces an exposure of slavery in the Middle East or gulags in the Soviet Union, foreign regimes will be able to tell their own people that the corporation is an instrument of the British Government.'

Virtually all the protesters with access to the British media (that is, people from the centre of the Labour Party rightwards), lamented not that yet another film on Ireland was being suppressed, but that the actors had ignored the rules of the game. Neil Kinnock, and the National Council for Civil Liberties, complained that the ban had given more publicity to 'terrorists' than transmission would have done. (The NCCL made the extraordinary recommendation that, 'The government should rely on the BBC's usual high standards of impartiality to reveal terrorists for the violent men they are.' This might make an interesting starting point for a student essay!) National Union of Journalists spokespersons proclaimed their detestation of 'terrorism' and that they fully accepted the existing internal 'guidelines'. David Owen of the Social Democratic Party said the film should 'never have gone further than the cutting room'. Many of those who objected to the *Real Lives* ban will doubtless connive at censorship in the future, provided it is less obviously done.

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COPYRIGHT AS CENSORSHIP: NOTES ON 'DEATH VALLEY DAYS'

BY JON DOVEY



Altered image: news footage renewed in *Death Valley Days*.

These notes are based on the experience of obtaining copyright clearance for some of the material contained in the scratch video *Death Valley Days*. The programme was originally made as an experiment, with no budget and no reference to copyright problems. When it became obvious that the tape had a potential broadcast sale we began trying to obtain copyright clearance for some of the shots we had used which we had collected from library stock and off-air recordings. Obtaining clearance only became possible when Channel Four offered to pay the clearance fees involved as part of their *Eleventh Hour* series in September '85. Much of the original clearance work was undertaken by

Clare Beavan, who became our mentor in the mysteries of copyright clearance. It is also appropriate here to thank Phil Windeatt of Diverse Reports for his help and support.

In looking at censorship we won't confront its many faces unless we acknowledge that it is not a single transitive act – it does not only occur when the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) or the BBC Board of Governors suddenly step in and wield the big stick. In fact such instances only really occur when all the other myriad mechanisms of censorship have failed. These mechanisms include control of access to the means of production, scheduling, notions of 'balance', self censorship, the demands of the

client and audience, control of the budget. Censorship is a process constantly regenerating itself around these points of conflict between the programme-maker and all the other groups with an investment in the final product. Much of this process takes place against the murky background of a constantly shifting, yet unspoken, consensus of what is, or is not, permissible. Most of the rules are, by their nature, unwritten – the ‘consensus’ shifting according to the relative strength or weakness of the State.

Programme-makers can also be gagged by being refused access to the information or images they need for any given production. Apparently, we are undergoing an ‘information revolution’; we are suffering massive information proliferation. Who controls the information and images? The fight for control of information, the struggle for access to information, is the fight against the many guises of censorship.

Technology is central to this fight. The process of the ‘information revolution’ has developed a split in the forces of capital which most directly effect the audio-visual industries. On one hand we have the producers of the hardware, primarily Japanese-based multinationals, marketing more and more technology which facilitates the flow of information. From photocopiers to computers, video recorders to satellite receivers, technology showers down upon us – making it ever easier to produce and, crucially, *reproduce* information. These innovations directly threaten the interests of the software owners, the other major block of capital that runs the business – in this case, the US film majors and the UK broadcast networks who actually own the copyright on most of the images we see, and a lot more that we don’t. The technical innovations sold by the hardware block make it increasingly difficult for the software block to keep track of their production. Potentially it offers them more and bigger audiences: however, because the technology is changing so fast the software owners can’t always keep up. During the first flowering of the international audio-visual industries, the producers often kept control of the software by also owning the means of distribution – the cinema chains. However, the more means of distribution that exist, broadcast, cassette, cable,

satellite, the weaker the links become. (Newspaper and cable magnate Rupert Murdoch’s purchase of Twentieth Century Fox, and cable pioneer Ted Turner’s purchase of MGM, are attempts to reforge these links.) As the paths of dissemination increase so the labyrinth of copyright law lengthens and entangles itself. In theory copyright law should protect the economic interests of the people that produce the information, or image. In practice most of the people who *actually produce* images simply collect their wage, or their fee, and wait for the next job to come in. Copyright law does not necessarily protect *their* interests. It protects the interests of the copyright holders and, of course, the interests of all the lawyers the employers keep in business.

The hype surrounding the scratch video style is a direct response to the above circumstances. Scratch is perceived as being a bit dangerous because it occupies the ground opened by this conflict within different capital interests. Scratch is a response to the same technological imperative as the one that drives the ‘information revolution’. Except that rather than offering us the usual ‘order’, scratch offers another, a different and pleasurable way to *remake* sense. It offers the pleasure of the collector, or the junk artist: comic book montage video. Scratch collects images ‘owned’ by the software producers and disseminated on various kinds of video technology and then, using the same technology, reinterprets them, creating something new. It turns the conventional use of the image and the technology inside out by using already made electronic images as the colour for its canvas. It begins precisely at the point at which the technology makes it impossible for software producers to maintain *physical* control of their images, thereby posing the question ‘Who owns the electronic image?’

Initially scratch is a relatively simple process and, given access to post-production equipment, relatively free from censorial interventions. It is a process which offered me, in 1984, the opportunity to produce some of my own counter propaganda, at a time when it was needed. Like much ‘independent’ video, *Death Valley Days* is made from the desire to create the kind of TV never allowed to grace our screens, the stories you never see. It sets out to be neither balanced nor ‘fair’. It was made in an active spirit of anti-

54 censorship. Since it was made on no budget the opportunity for anything other than self censorship did not exist.

However, once the tape became a commodity, long after completion, the producers automatically engaged with a part of the industry in which censorship is endemic—copyright law as it affects News and Current Affairs imagery. The point at which the programme became a commodity was marked by Channel Four's offer to broadcast part of it as part of their *Eleventh Hour* video series. Many video workers were called upon to negotiate the litigious waters of copyright clearance for the first time. Once the tape-makers start getting paid for broadcast rights, no matter how little, they of course have to pay for the use of other people's material.

In order to pay for the use of material it is necessary to locate the owner and negotiate a mutually acceptable fee, though in the case of News and Current Affairs these fees are set at standard rates. However, we soon discovered that the clearance process is far from being that simple—indeed financial considerations are the last thing that gets discussed. First of all it's necessary to successfully answer the questions 'Who are you and what kind of a programme are you making?' If you don't come up with a confidence-inspiring line you'll be refused clearance, no matter what your financial resources amount to. Copyright owners are terrified that producers might make something using their images that might upset, or even nudge, the appletart. They live in fear of being refused continuing access to Current Affairs information and footage. This continuing access depends entirely upon them playing the Current Affairs game by the rules—'balance' at all times, respectful treatment of those in authority, otherwise suddenly they don't get passes or camera positions in those vital press conferences.

In effect this means that the material you have used will only be cleared if you are a known producer. Anything that falls outside the well-worn pathways of the industry's output is automatically suspicious. In its original pre-broadcast, pre-censored form, *Death Valley Days* included large chunks of material issued by the Government's Central Office of Information. This footage was *given away* to accredited news crews, of whom we were one, at the June '84 London Economic Summit. It included hours of

Western politicians parading about making complete non-policy statements for the benefit of the assembled barrage of lenses. These shots were made available with copyright clearance and appeared worldwide as journalists filed reports on the non-events of the conference. Our original cut used some of these shots but the COI refused to let us broadcast them because they didn't like the sound of what we might be doing. This was despite the fact that they had been happy enough to issue us with press passes for the conference and had given away thousands of pounds worth of broadcast-standard footage to both ourselves and other journalists. (These negotiations took place at the time of the *Real Lives* saga and the COI executives were extremely anxious.)

Any footage of the Right Honourable M Thatcher proved conspicuously difficult to clear. London Weekend Television refused to release footage of her from a recent *chât* show which we'd used in the programme's original version. We can only assume that politicians' agreement to appear on such programmes is conditional upon the understanding that the company won't use the footage for any other purpose. Who owns an electronic image? Other libraries holding similar footage of politicians insisted that their rights only extended to conventional News and Current Affairs usage and only agreed to clear material after pressure from Channel Four. Unsurprisingly, our own efforts to persuade copyright owners that we were really producing a News and Current Affairs programme weren't very successful. Peter Savage's *Tory Stories*, again using all Thatcher footage, proved particularly intractable; indeed it was only decided on the day of broadcast to include the piece after it had gained the support of a few powerful individuals within the Channel.

Time and again our main problem was simply being an unknown company and therefore politically suspect. Regular customers of film and video libraries and well known individuals within the industry can usually get material cleared with comparative ease. But even if they can pay the required fee (£120 per minute for Independent Television News footage, £200 for the BBC's), independent producers have difficulty getting access to news footage unless they can convince the copyright holders that the material will be used in the original 'spirit' in



Limited clearance: portrait of a politician from *Death Valley Days*.

which it was transmitted, rather than as comedy or satire.

The story isn't all doom, gloom and conspiracy theory, however. We had our successes. Obtaining clearance for any of Ronald Reagan's old movies these days is not easy unless you want to buy the rights to screen the whole thing, which is unlikely. We were initially refused clearance for clips we had used, until a certain executive had a word in the ear of another who happened to be lunching with the president of the relevant US major. The next day, lo and behold, it was cleared. Such are the mysteries of copyright clearance. Another clip we had used featured an American TV evangelist: on calling their Fort Worth office our researcher found herself speaking to the very man who appeared in the clip. Amazingly, he was only too happy to permit and even encourage the use of his image in the hope of spreading the word any way possible. Another bizarre fable developed around our use of material designated 'US Newspool'. This footage, generated in the United States and covering Presidential and state events, is satellited around the world to TV networks for *free* use. Although our original source told us that nobody ever bothers to clear such footage because it's free, we decided to attempt to authorise use of the various Ronald Reagan news clips we had re-cut. We set out looking for

someone to give permission. No one would own up, however—the UK networks, the US Embassy Press Office, the US networks, none of them knew where this stuff actually originates. It just comes down from the satellite and onto our screens, nobody apparently claims it. So who *owns* electronic images?

We eventually succeeded in escaping from the labyrinth with two pieces of work cleared for one UK transmission, half of the original *Death Valley* tape. This was not achieved without having to re-edit various bits of one of the pieces, chiefly because the Thatcher shots just weren't forthcoming. At no point was any direct censorship aimed at our work, but the process of negotiating clearance made it very clear that the control of access to 'News' images itself constitutes a powerful, if indirect, form of regulation. That is not to argue that all copyright should be abolished. But those in the business of selling images should at least clarify the terms of their transactions and eliminate unwritten exclusions of certain purchasers and uses of purchased material. No matter what our financial resources, it would not have been possible for us to clear the pieces we did without the support of Channel Four. In turn their support would not have been possible had they not been able to justify the programme as 'art' and therefore politically innocuous. But *that* is another story....

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THE MEDIA, THE MILITARY AND CENSORSHIP

BY KEVIN ROBINS AND
FRANK WEBSTER

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The need for secrecy and censorship in military affairs often seems self-evident, beyond questioning: 'The undeniable force of the appeal to military secrecy in promoting national security can make moral questions about its drawbacks and dangers seem inconsequential by comparison.' We are asked 'to take on faith the need for secrecy on the grounds that an open debate of the reasons for such a need might endanger national security'¹. The appeal to national and operational security works to dissolve all critique and discussion.

Our arguments in this article are directed against these military shibboleths of secrecy and security. In what follows, we argue that, far from belonging to the exotic and esoteric margins of media sociology, the relationship between the military and the media offers the *paradigm case* for understanding the role of the mass media in our society, and, particularly, the lines of *power* between media institutions and state apparatuses. In the words of Cockerell *et al*, 'wars by definition are abnormal times. But they paint in primary colours the patterns of information dissemination and control that remain pastel-shaded in peace time.'² Military secrecy, censorship and information control are not anomalous; they are not exceptions that prove the rule, as many would have us believe. They are, rather, part of what is normal in our society.

After the Falklands

In its immediate aftermath, the Falklands campaign was seen as one for which the government, and particularly the Ministry of Defence (MOD), was singularly ill-prepared. Taken by surprise, it was argued, the government was forced into taking overhasty and

ad hoc initiatives that resulted in an inefficient, inconsistent and incoherent information policy. Falklands veteran Robert Fox writes of a 'climate of chaos on information policy'³. Censorship rules were not explicit or consistent; misinformation strategies were practised; technical facilities were denied to reporters; off-the-record briefings and confidences were inexplicably discontinued.

Particularly vocal in his criticisms was the BBC's Assistant Director for News and Current Affairs. For him, the MOD had failed to understand the importance of the 'information war': 'the Falklands crisis has shown us how *not* to fight an information war. The MOD's performance in this area has been close to disastrous.'⁴ In Protheroe's opinion, the government was guilty of undermining the special relationship that had developed between military public relations departments and journalists. ('They speak our shorthand, understand our pressures'.) Consequently, the media were unable to play their part efficiently in gaining 'the support and understanding of the public' during the Falklands escapade. (This is surely a voice chastened by the Prime Minister's aggressive diatribe against the BBC in the Commons on May 11, 1982.)

¹ Sissela Bok, *Secrets: On the Ethics of Concealment and Revelation*, New York, Pantheon, 1982, p 192, 202.

² Michael Cockerell, Peter Hennessy, David Walker, *Sources Close to the Prime Minister*, London, Macmillan, 1984, p 144.

³ Robert Fox, *Eyewitness Falklands*, London, Methuen, 1982.

⁴ Alan Protheroe, 'Why We Have Lost the Information War', *Listener*, June 3, 1982, p 3.

As a consequence of the media's frustration and anger towards what they saw as churlish and irrational behaviour by the MOD, and because of potentially damaging differences and misunderstandings between the military and the media, the House of Commons Defence Committee undertook a series of hearings immediately after the Falklands campaign to assess the press and public information aspect of the war⁵. The intention was to salve the media's wounded pride and, strategically, as we shall go on to argue, to reestablish media-military relations on a more functional basis. At these hearings Alan Protheroe appeared as the BBC's representative and again he expressed his strong criticisms of the Government's handling of the 'information war' during the Falklands conflict. The Corporation, in its memorandum to the Defence Committee, accused the government of censorship, referring particularly to the suppression of pictures from the theatre of war; it suggested that items of disinformation were planted; and it argued that the MOD had 'come very close to the "management" or "manipulation" of news, an idea that is alien to the concept of communication in a free society' (p 45). This was all, according to Protheroe, a consequence of the 'failure of perception of the role and the importance of the media in this particular conflict', reflecting a 'lack of organisation' and a 'lack of will to meet the requirements of the media' (pp 52-53). The BBC felt it necessary to remind the government that 'in a democracy journalism is about information and understanding, not propaganda and managed "news"' (p 50).

The BBC asserted that its function in the crisis was 'to provide the maximum amount of truthful information to the public' (p 41). In this respect it judged the Falklands episode to be a sorry failure – a consequence of the government's inefficiency, obstructiveness and lack of vision. In his *Listener* article Alan Protheroe appeals to what he sees as the more enlightened information policy operative during the Vietnam war: – 'Vietnam demonstrated that the public expects, requires, indeed demands, information and pictures, and that such material needs to be distributed throughout the world. It would seem that civil servants of the United Kingdom chose to learn the wrong lesson. Again.'⁶ Conversely, Protheroe's opposite numbers at Independent Television News, in their memorandum to the

House of Commons Defence Committee, suggest that 'the Vietnam analogy was a spectre constantly stalking the Falklands decision-makers and was invoked by the military as an object lesson in how not to deal with the media.'⁷ Perhaps the government's information policy was not the shambles that Protheroe suggests. In our view, there was a clear and lucid decision to discard the Vietnam model of (comparatively) open access and communication for journalists. The policy of censoring, controlling and managing news flows was not a result of inefficiency and disorganisation. It was, rather, from the perspective of the British state and military, a coherent and effective strategy, one that rendered the media more instrumental, functional and compliant to the war effort. As Phillip Knightley has observed, 'the MOD achieved exactly what its masters wanted it to do and its role in the Falklands campaign will go down in the history of journalism as a classic example of how to manage the media in wartime.'⁸

The Lessons of the Falklands

After the war, the government hastily set about the task of learning the lessons of the 'information war'. A number of important reports and papers appeared in quick succession, and of these two are especially significant. The first is the report by the House of Commons Defence Committee of its proceedings, *The Handling of Press and Public Information During the Falklands Conflict*⁹. The second is the report of a committee, chaired by General Sir Hugh

⁵ House of Commons Defence Committee, First Report, Session 1982-83, *The Handling of Press and Public Information During the Falklands Conflict*, vol 2, 17-II, London, HMSO, December 1982 (hereinafter HCDC2).

⁶ Alan Protheroe, op cit, p 3.

⁷ HCDC2, p 72.

⁸ Phillip Knightley, 'The Falklands: How Britannia Ruled the News', *Columbia Journalism Review*, October 1982, p 51; cf. John Pilger, 'An Ideal War', *New York Times*, May 21, 1982.

⁹ House of Commons Defence Committee, First Report, Session 1982-83, *The Handling of Press and Public Information During the Falklands Conflict*, vol 1, 17-I, London, HMSO, December 1982 (hereinafter, HCDC1).

Beach, on *The Protection of Military Information*¹⁰. Each of these elicited a response from the government¹¹. Additionally, the Ministry of Defence commissioned the Department of War Studies, King's College, London, and the Centre for Journalism Studies at Cardiff to produce reports on 'relations between Government, Armed Services and the Media in times of armed conflict'. As yet these latter remain unpublished and only partial accounts of this work are available¹².

The relationship between the military and the media is usually summarised in terms of the former's need for secrecy and security, as opposed to the latter's demands for information and publicity. The post-Falklands project, it seems to us, was to reconcile these contradictory ambitions on a new and more effective basis. The objective was to register, establish and legitimate the military's claims to secrecy, while at the same time establishing a harmonious, effective (and symbiotic) relationship with the media (one that would save the appearances of traditional, liberal ideals of publicity and open communication). It was necessary to achieve an advantageous balance between, on the one hand, censorship and news management (which had proved itself during the Falklands conflict) and, on the other, a public relations strategy that could win over the media, and, thereby, the 'public' (an aspect of the Falklands affair that had been far less successful). Though we make the distinction somewhat tentatively, it seems to us that the Defence Committee Report focuses primarily on the PR aspect of military policy, while the Beach Report seeks to validate the

repressive aspects (censorship, news management and the general culture of security), and we make use of this (partly heuristic) differentiation to facilitate discussion.

The very occurrence of the House of Commons Defence Committee proceedings – irrespective of the debates that took place, almost – was, as we have suggested, an important act of conciliation towards a disgruntled press establishment. The Committee's remit was to establish what went wrong in the government's propaganda and public relations strategy during the Falklands conflict in order to improve matters in the future. In a spirit of propitiation it proclaims the need for 'forebearance and mutual understanding' (p 1) in order to 'sustain that relationship of trust between the public relations organisations [of the military] and the journalists which is essential to the success of any information activities' (p 1v). Northern Ireland is offered as an example of how, by keeping open channels of communication, the military can create 'an effective working relationship with the media' (p x).

These proclamations, however, are not made in an idealistic and disinterested spirit. The committee's attitude to the press is decidedly instrumental. There is an awareness that the media are indispensable in crisis situations: 'In a modern war, a full appreciation of the public information aspects is as unavoidable as confronting problems of a more strictly military relevance' (p xxxv). The objective is 'incorporating the media into the organisation for war' (p 1iii) to promote both the 'nurturing of world opinion' and also 'the political and psychological elements of national security policy' (p 1). And, if the media are to be truly functional, it is made clear, this must be on terms set by the military. Behind the rhetorical respect for free mass media there is a more Machiavellian perspective. 'Many principles supposedly regarded as sacred and absolute within the media', it is argued, 'are applied in a less rigid and categorical way by the public as a whole when it is judging its Government's conduct of a war In our judgement the public is, in general, quite ready to tolerate being misled to some extent if the enemy is also misled . . .' (p xiii). On this basis the Committee is prepared to argue that 'censorship can be justified' and 'there should be no reason to be unnecessarily reticent or dilatory in establishing the framework

¹⁰ Ministry of Defence, *The Protection of Military Information: Report of the Study Group on Censorship*, London, HMSO, December 1983, Cmnd 9112 (hereinafter, Beach).

¹¹ Ministry of Defence, *The Handling of Press and Public Information During the Falklands Conflict*, Observations presented by the Secretary of State for Defence on the First Report of the Defence Committee, House of Commons Papers 17-I-II 1982-83, London HMSO, March, 1983, Cmnd 8820; Ministry of Defence, *The Protection of Military Information: Government Response to the Report of the Study Group on Censorship*, London, HMSO, April 1985, Cmnd 9499.

¹² See Derrick Mercer, 'Is Press Freedom a Threat During National Crises?', *RUSI: Journal of the Royal United Services Institute for Defence Studies*, vol 129 no 3, September 1984; Geoffrey Mungham, 'The Eternal Triangle: Relations between Governments, Armed Services and the Media', *Army Quarterly and Defence Journal*, vol 115 no 1, January 1985.

60 for its application or in explaining its rationale to representatives of the media' (p liii). The minatory invocation of 'public opinion' and the insistent appeal to 'operational security' serve to set the narrow parameters within which journalistic 'freedom' can operate.

This latter emphasis sets an agenda that is taken up in the Beach Report, which deals explicitly with the question of military censorship. Although this is a document of particular importance for any discussion of censorship in contemporary Britain, it has received almost no attention¹³. A sophisticated and accomplished text, the Report undertakes a survey of the scope of military censorship from World War II, through Korea, Vietnam and Northern Ireland, to the Falklands conflict.

Acknowledging that 'censorship has a bad name in Western societies' (p 7), the committee's intention is to rectify this situation and vindicate the military use of censorship. It argues that 'even with self-censorship exercised by the media, some form of official censorship in time of conflict is desirable.' Moreover past experience suggests that 'editors actually welcomed the facilities provided by censorship' (p 31). Consequently, the committee believes that, during a major conventional war in the future, 'the majority of British journalists would welcome a system that would enable them to check whether material which they were proposing to publish might aid the enemy or put British lives at risk. We are also convinced that the British public would support any measures introduced to this end' (p 42). 'The objections to censorship', Beach asserts, 'do not, for the most part, stand up' (p 31).

An especially important aspect of the Report is its acute awareness of the social and technological factors that, in the 1980s, provide the context within which the state must assess its attitude to censorship. Beach refers to current social fragmentation and cynicism, to the absence of a consensus on social and political values. A manifestation of this is the development of alternative and ethnic ('fringe') media that may not prove reliable in a crisis situation. But more important is the proliferation of new information and communications technologies: cable, direct broadcast by satellite, and electronic news-gathering equipment, telecommunications and local radio. Their very profusion and

pervasiveness present insuperable problems to any government that hopes to practise enforced censorship and monitoring: 'The technical possibilities for evasion, and the sheer volume of communications today, are such that censorship in a democracy would only be effective if the need for it were widely accepted' (p 32). The reality is that 'the country can no longer be enclosed in an "information net"' ¹⁴. The Falklands campaign provided extraordinary circumstances in which the government was able to control communications channels from the theatre of conflict, but for the future, the new technologies demand a readjustment of thinking if state and military information objectives are to be ensured.

If the effective control of information is no longer practicable, then it becomes necessary to create a relationship with the media – and here Beach is entirely in line with the House of Commons Defence Committee – that will ensure voluntary acquiescence to censorship (i.e. self-censorship): 'voluntary co-operation should be the guiding principle. The Government must create the greatest possible degree of trust between itself and the media.' ¹⁵ The objective, according to Beach, is 'to create a climate in which journalists themselves will help to protect militarily damaging information' (p 39). If trusting relations can be established and the media's confidence won, then it will be possible, on the home front, to 'engender a responsible attitude' among journalists and to make voluntary acceptance of censorship workable. In the field of battle, however, the media may be handled more easily. What Beach envisages here is a system of accreditation, akin to that tried out in the Falklands, 'to ensure some control over war correspondents'. The control, the Report goes on to say, 'would form part of a "bargain": correspondents might be offered certain facilities (for example, access to sensitive areas, confidential background briefings, transport, telecommunications, rations and protective

¹³ A noteworthy exception is Philip Schlesinger, 'Preparing for the Next Media War', *Cencrastus*, no 17, Summer 1984, pp 23-24.

¹⁴ Cmnd 9499, op cit, p 4.

¹⁵ *ibid*, pp 3-4.

clothing) in return for their agreement to submit material for vetting' (p 49). Accreditation, combined with 'stop lists' offers a balance of carrot and stick to control war correspondents. As Philip Schlesinger has argued, Beach 'has provided the main elements of a blueprint for censoring the next war'¹⁶.

Vietnam, Falklands, Grenada

Alan Protheroe, as we have seen, held up the Vietnam War as a model of free access and communication for the media, an ideal against which all war reporting should be measured. This line of reasoning, however, is quite contrary to the conclusions drawn by military and government personnel in both the US and Britain. Thus the House of Commons Defence Committee believes that the Americans were 'over-generous in acquiescing to the media's wishes'¹⁷. And the Beach Report maintains that 'there is little doubt that the media, including television, played a role in the American public's disillusionment' with the war in Vietnam¹⁸. There have been persuasive critiques of the idea that the media, and television particularly, were directly instrumental in undermining the morale and support of the American population¹⁹, but such arguments have not sprung deep ideological roots. The belief prevails, in both military and popular consciousness, that media coverage brought about the final American defeat. This viewpoint is most forcefully put by Robert Elegant who argues that 'for the first time in modern history, the outcome of a war was determined not on the battlefield, but on the printed page and, above all, on the television screen': 'the pen and the camera proved decisively mightier than the bayonet and ultra-modern weapons.' Elegant is particularly abrasive in his condemnation of television which 'was crucial in shifting the emphasis from fact to emotion. And television will play the same role in future conflicts – on the Western side, of course. It will not and cannot expose the crimes of an enemy who is too shrewd to allow the cameras free play'²⁰. Subsequently, military strategists throughout the world became phobic about the presence of television cameras in the field of conflict. In 1974, ITN Defence Correspondent Christopher Wain was suggesting that 'much of the reluctance of various armed

forces to permit television-crews freedom of access to active theatres (and this includes the British Army in Northern Ireland) stems from the Americans' experience in Vietnam'²¹. He refers to Mozambique and the Middle East War as examples, from his own experience, of this censorship of television pictures. In Britain, the evidence is that this lesson was already well learned in the early seventies. When, at the Defence Committee hearings, the Permanent Under-Secretary at the MOD, Sir Frank Cooper, declared 'the criticism we have had is a small drop in the ocean compared to the problems we would have had in dealing with the television coverage'²², he was not coming to a new realisation.

As an information war Vietnam was a disaster. Political and military strategists were forced to look for a more efficient way of controlling information flow and preserving military secrecy. A primary objective was to mobilise often refractory journalists for, rather than against, any war effort. The media were clearly the key to establishing the vital support of 'public opinion'²³, and it was therefore imperative to harmonise relations between journalists and military personnel. British military author Alan Hooper argues that perhaps the fundamental lesson of Vietnam was the lack of understanding between military and media. It was this that lost

¹⁶ Philip Schlesinger, *op cit*, p 24.

¹⁷ HCDC1, p xlviii.

¹⁸ Beach, p 35.

¹⁹ Michael Mandelbaum, 'Vietnam: The Television War', *Parameters: Journal of the U.S. Army War College*, vol 13 no 1, March 1983. See also the discussion in Harrison E Salisbury (ed), *Vietnam Reconsidered: Lessons From a War*, New York, Harper & Row, 1984. For the impact of the Vietnam War on public opinion, see John E Mueller, *War, Presidents and Public Opinion*, New York, John Wiley, 1973.

²⁰ Robert Elegant, 'How to Lose a War', *Encounter*, vol 57 no 2, August 1981, p 73, 76, 89.

²¹ Christopher Wain, 'Television Reporting of Military Operations – A Personal View', *RUSI: Journal of the Royal United Services Institute for Defence Studies*, vol 119 no 1, March 1974, p 71.

²² HCDC2, p 28.

²³ cf Major Brian Mullady, 'The Military Implications of Public Opinion', *Air University Review*, vol 29 no 4, May–June 1978.

62 the 'battle for the mind' of the American people. The same lesson, he points out, had to be relearned in Northern Ireland: 'Little or no attempt had been made to prepare reporters for the realities of the conflict and the military were equally caught off balance.' The lesson was that 'both the military and the media needed to be educated about the realities of reporting conflict'²⁴.

But if the importance of PR was one lesson of Vietnam, the other was the need for military secrecy and censorship. The military must be able to regulate media access to the theatre of war, and it must be able to control the information disseminated by journalists. Censorship and information management was something that Britain already had experience in, both in Northern Ireland, but also in the string of 'low level conflicts' in which it had been involved since World War II (Palestine, Malaya, Kenya, Cyprus, Oman, Aden, Borneo). Writing about Oman, Fred Halliday has argued that 'the security that surrounds the war was... the result of a deliberate policy of concealing, or at least minimising, its significance.' He goes on to suggest that 'most of what was heard was purveyed by journalists close to the official British position.... The press were only allowed in on supervised visits. Many of the events there were simply hushed up...'²⁵. This British 'tradition' of secrecy and censorship was mobilised and refined during the conflict with Argentina over the Falkland Islands. It was a strategy that has found approval in ever wider circles. In the post-Vietnam era, the American military was cultivating an appetite for censorship. During the mobilisation exercises 'Nifty Nugget' (1978) and 'Proud Spirit/MOBEX' (1980), the use of field press censorship was assessed. When, in 1982, it was possible to observe censorship in a full-scale military operation, one American military commentator concluded that 'the British example may be worth imitating'²⁶.

What the Falklands crystallised was a new model of military-media relations. It showed how effectively the military could practise – and legitimate – a policy of secrecy and censorship, and how the media could be humbled and mobilised behind a campaign of national chauvinism²⁷. One commentator has suggested that the Falklands campaign was 'a very unusual

and old-fashioned war. From the British, but not the Argentine, side there were no television images. The correspondents with the task force were utterly dependent on the military for their stories and their external communications. This made possible tight censorship.' His conclusion is that 'the war was a strange and atavistic interlude for Britain, a curious and enthralling distraction from its economic troubles'²⁸. Our own view is quite contrary to this. Far from being atavistic, we believe that the 'Falklands model' is prefigurative, a new paradigm for the military handling of information.

Indications of this new direction are quite clear. Perhaps the least successful aspect of the Falklands campaign was the PR aspect. As we have suggested, relations between the military and journalists were often difficult. In the wake of the campaign, however, there are distinct signs of a determination to create a more harmonious relationship between the media, the armed forces and the MOD. One aspect of this is a growing interest by the military in media studies: 'The Ministry of Defence agrees that media studies should be an integral part of higher defence training, and increasing attention is being given in this subject. Limited media studies already form part of some of the courses at the Defence and Staff Colleges, and some consideration is being given to how increased awareness of the needs of the media can be encouraged in all three Services.'²⁹ This MOD document also points out that, in this context, a greater element of PR activity will be introduced in future 'exercise play'. The idea of the accreditation 'bargain' for war correspondents has also gathered momentum. It was practised as part of the Eternal Triangle exercise of the Rhine

²⁴ Alan Hooper, *The Military and the Media*, Aldershot, Gower, 1982, p 122.

²⁵ Fred Halliday, *Mercenaries: 'Counter-Insurgency' in the Gulf*, Nottingham, Spokesman, 1977, p 24, 61.

²⁶ Major David R Kiernan, 'The Case for Censorship', *Army*, March 1983, p 24.

²⁷ See Edgar O'Ballance, 'The Other Falkland Campaign', *Military Review*, vol 63 no 1, January 1983.

²⁸ Lawrence Freedman, 'The War of the Falkland Islands, 1982', *Foreign Affairs*, vol 61 no 1, Fall 1982, p 210.

²⁹ Cmnd 8820, op cit, p 6; cf HCDC1 p 1.

army in October 1983. At the time, John Ezard of the *Guardian* wrote that the rules of the game entailed 'the tightest press restrictions to be mooted outside the Eastern bloc in modern times'³⁰. And again, this 'bargain', which entails access to restricted information in return for strict self-censorship, was central to Operation Lionheart, conducted in West Germany in September 1984. A particular success here, according to one participant, was the 'efficacy of the Army's Escort Officer scheme... an arrangement designed to facilitate military-media relations by having journalists escorted in and around combat zones by trained "minders"'³¹.

But those were just exercises. The 'Falklands model' has now been tested under real battle conditions. In October 1983, the American invasion of Grenada offered a full-scale example of the censored war, and laid to rest the ghost of Vietnam which had so haunted the American military. More than the Falklands, Grenada was characterised by censorship, secrecy, misinformation and propaganda. At the highest levels the British experience was assimilated and insolently practised. According to Donna Demac, the news blackout was 'the culmination of a multi-pronged plan by the government to centralize the flow of information and limit the role of the media'³². And, from the perspective of the American state and military, it was a singular success.

Military censorship is just one aspect of a general culture of secrecy in Britain, one that, according to Des Wilson, has become 'entrenched in the psyche of the governing and managerial elite'³³. In all areas – military affairs, business and trade, politics, science and technology – there is a deep conviction that only secrecy can ensure an environment of security,

stability and predictability. And the more any one party makes use of secrecy, the more necessary it becomes for others to reciprocate, culminating in what Sissela Bok calls the 'secrecy race'³⁴.

Propaganda and secrecy are symbiotically related. Through various strategies the State seeks to monopolise and dominate the flow of information in society: the extension of military secrecy to civilian areas, enforced by the Official Secrets Act; the dissemination of 'official' information through the State's information machinery (press officers, PR divisions, leaks, Saatchi campaigns); the attack on 'public service' ideals of communication in the form of the BBC; information gathering (surveillance, private opinion polls); censorship, misinformation and disinformation. As Robert Harris comments, 'the instinctive secrecy of the military and Civil Service...; the lies, the misinformation, the manipulation of public opinion by the authorities; the political intimidation of broadcasters; the ready connivance of the media at their distortion... all these occur as much in normal times in Britain as in war.'³⁵

³⁰ John Ezard, 'Letter of the Law for War Reporters', *Guardian*, October 27, 1983.

³¹ G Mungham, *op cit*, p 20.

³² Donna Demac, *Keeping America Uninformed: Government Secrecy in the 1980s*, New York, Pilgrim Press, 1984, p 101.

³³ Des Wilson (ed), *The Secrets File: The Case for Freedom of Information in Britain Today*, London, Heinemann, 1984, p 1; cf K G Robertson, *Public Secrets: A Study in the Development of Government Secrecy*, London, Macmillan, 1982.

³⁴ Sissela Bok, *op cit*, p 182.

³⁵ Robert Harris, *Gotcha! The Media, The Government and the Falklands Crisis*, London, Faber, 1983, p 151.

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PROGRAMMING STRATEGY AND CENSORSHIP AT IPSWICH FILM THEATRE

BY REBECCA WINFIELD

This article details two instances of attempted programme censorship at Ipswich Film Theatre in 1984. During the same period, the Film Theatre was extending its role beyond that of an exhibition venue and this policy resulted in unprecedented scrutiny of the Film Theatre's activities by both the management and the press. There are two points that should be emphasised, the first being that this article is not intended as a generalisation about the programming policy of other Regional Film Theatres. Secondly, while my experience at Ipswich raises questions about the constraints of the institutional context in which the Film Theatre operates, that Theatre does provide a valuable space for the screening of genuinely radical work and for the promotion of film education in its broadest sense.

Ipswich Film Theatre is a full-time Regional Film Theatre. It was established in 1975 and is presently funded by a Labour-controlled Borough Council in conjunction with the British Film Institute and Eastern Arts Association. Grant aid from both the BFI and EAA is dependent upon the Film Theatre demonstrating a commitment to the promotion of a 'debate-centred film culture', with particular emphasis currently being given to film education in both the formal and informal sector.¹

The primary function of the Film Officer is that of film programmer, but the post also entails the production of all publicity material and documentation and the organisation of day-events and other educational work. Film programmes are drawn up on a bimonthly basis, with advice on film availability being provided by the BFI's Programming Unit², before being discussed at the Film Theatre Advisory Committee meeting³. The final programme is

then submitted firstly to the Council's Entertainments, Arts and Museums Sub-Committee and then to the Recreation and Amenities Committee for authorisation. As its name suggests, the Film Theatre Advisory Committee does not have any executive authority and all programmes must be approved by the above Council Committees.

When I took up the post of Film Officer in June 1983, there was one main auditorium seating 221. Although fully equipped with 35mm and 16mm projection facilities, the main auditorium is ill-suited to the needs of educational work, seminars and video exhibition. Before my appointment, plans had already been laid to convert an adjacent space into a 40-seat auditorium with 16mm and video projection facilities. In the autumn of 1983, the conversion work commenced with the approval of Ipswich Borough Council and with financial support from EAA and, at a later date, the BFI. Throughout negotiations to obtain Council

¹ Unlike some Regional Film Theatres, Ipswich is not an independent Film Theatre but is owned and controlled by the Borough Council. Thus the Film Officer has no authority to make policy decisions. His/her role is to *advise* Council members on policy.

² Andrew Youdell from the BFI's Programming Unit provided valuable advice and support during my time at Ipswich, and was a constant ally at Advisory Committee meetings.

³ The Film Theatre Advisory Committee consists of some 15 members, only 5 of whom are (currently) women. It is chaired by a Labour councillor who holds the power of veto and also chairs the Entertainments, Arts and Museums Sub-Committee. The rest of the Advisory Committee is made up of other local councillors, teachers, a representative from the Ipswich Film Society and representatives from both the BFI and EAA. Aside from the BFI and EAA members, none at the time of writing are directly engaged with film at either practical or theoretical level.

66 support for the project, it was stressed that the Other Screen (as it became known) would act as a much-needed space for debate and discussion around the screenings that would take place there. I was asked to prepare a policy document outlining the Other Screen's intended function; the ensuing paper, which received Committee approval, clearly stated that the emphasis would be on structured programming with a view to exploring sectional interests and the way in which these interests are filmically represented. The intention was to move away from the conception of an anonymous or homogeneous audience and central to this policy was the organisation of discussions and day-events around the various seasons.⁴ With the recent importance being attached to film education, media studies and the broadening of the scope of activities within the Regional Film Theatre sector by the BFI, this development of a second auditorium was encouraged by all parties concerned, not least by the Council, who saw an opportunity to increase revenue grants and ensure the future of the Film Theatre.

The Other Screen was due to open in February 1984 and I compiled a list of proposals for seasons in December for discussion at the Film Theatre Advisory Committee. These included American underground cinema, films made by women, jazz films, Asian and Afro-Caribbean cinema and films relating to the debate on nuclear arms. It was decided to open the Other Screen to the public for two nights a week initially, partly to minimise running costs and also because we were unsure of its likely popularity. Consequently, I selected just two seasons to cover the first eight weeks of operation: one on jazz and the other on the nuclear debate. The final programme was submitted to the two executive Council Committees and received approval a few days before the Other Screen was due to open, on February 2, 1984.

While being aware of the Council's low profile on nuclear issues, I was nevertheless quite unprepared for what followed. Although neither the Labour nor Conservative councillors on either Committee had queried the inclusion of the season on the nuclear debate at the time, the local evening paper saw an opportunity to capitalise on the subject. On receiving details of the Other Screen's inaugural programme, they

contacted the leader of the Conservative Opposition Group and advised her of the content. Her response provided the press with the following headline: 'BIASED FILMS STORM—New Screen Inquiry' (*Ipswich Evening Star*, 30.1.84). The supporting copy for this flier was based on an interview with the Opposition leader who described the programme as:

... quite simply a load of Socialist propaganda. ... The content of this programme is heavily biased in favour of the anti-nuclear movement, and no attempt appears to have been made to balance it up.

The paper had also obtained a statement from the Director of Recreation and Amenities, my superior, in which he promised a 'full internal inquiry' and the withdrawal of the season.

The 'politically biased' films referred to by the Opposition leader included two BBC documentaries, *Greenham Common—A Question of Conscience* and *A Guide to Armageddon*. The latter had been transmitted twice at peak viewing time and carried a narration by Ludovic Kennedy. In addition, I had selected two Japanese films, *Picadon* and *The Lost Generation*, along with *The Day After Trinity*, *Island of Crabs*, *Children of the Ashes*, *The Truth Game* and *Carry Greenham Home*. All of these titles are, to a greater or lesser degree, condemnations of nuclear warfare and arms escalation. My surprise at the Conservatives' attack resulted from my knowledge of earlier screenings by my predecessor of similar films, including *The War Game* and *The Day After Trinity*, which had passed without comment. However, the reason for this sudden intervention soon became clear, and was signalled in a further statement to the press by the Opposition leader:

This new film theatre is supposed to be educational ... issues such as these should be balanced if they are to be educational.

Ipswich Evening Star, 30.1.84.

In the past films such as *The War Game* had been tolerated because they had been viewed by an audience *imagined* to be politically

⁴ Although the Film Theatre has always sought to distinguish its programme from that of the mainstream cinemas, demands of profitability have inevitably resulted in an emphasis on commercially successful films.

undifferentiated. Such films were exhibited discretely along with mainstream releases, thus appearing as random inclusions in a pluralist programme. That much, to all except the extreme right perhaps, appears to have been acceptable. But the question of balance was a red herring – wider issues were at stake. The traditional view of cinema as a venue for the (presumed) passive consumption of film had been challenged by the Other Screen's declared intention of providing a forum for debate extending beyond that of normative aesthetic discourse.

Ultimately the Conservative opposition to the programme was overruled by the majority Labour group, who argued that since no objections to the films had been voiced in Committee, the screenings would go ahead. The press reported their decision in a lengthy article in which they again quoted the Conservative Opposition Group leader. She attributed this earlier failure to object to the programme by arguing that, 'When the list was first shown to the committees there was no indication of the content of the films, and in any case it was included with other (jazz) film titles as well' (*Ipswich Evening Star*, 31.1.84). One wonders just what her colleagues on those committees had supposed films such as *Greenham Common – A Question of Conscience* were about.

My response to these events was one of temporary self-censorship and the programme for April-May 1984 consisted of 'acceptable' art-house releases. In April 1984, I prepared a list of programme suggestions for the summer and, following the initiative of a similar season at the Phoenix in Leicester, I included a season on gay cinema. It was intended to run in both auditoria and be accompanied by substantial documentation and a day-event organised around a presentation that Simon Watney had agreed to give.⁵ The films selected were, by my own choice, conservative and included *Cruising*, *Cage Aux Folles* (Parts I & II) and *Making Love*.

The list of titles were presented to the Film Theatre Advisory Committee along with the various new releases that would be shown in the main theatre throughout June and July. When

the season came up for discussion, I outlined the proposal for a supporting day-event and a dossier to accompany it. The initial response was negative and there was a sense of dismay and embarrassment at the suggestion. The Committee members' reaction typified a connoisseurial attitude towards film redolent of the notion of film appreciation often associated with film societies. The discussion that ensued hovered around two lines of attack, the first being that it was important that the Other Screen in particular, and the Film Theatre in general, avoid any controversy over programming that might attract the attention of the press. Secondly, it was argued that not only would the season have a limited appeal, but that the Film Theatre was not the place for a debate on representations of homosexuality. This notwithstanding, permission was eventually granted for the screenings to proceed with two provisos: the first being that there should be no debate or day-event and the second, even more absurd, that the screenings should not be identified in publicity material as constituting a season of gay cinema. The season did take place, but the effect of these stipulations was to completely undermine the rationale for it. It can be argued that, in the absence of any documentation or debate, the films served only to reinforce precisely the values of heterosexual gender relations that would otherwise have been challenged.

Subsequently I continued to exhibit films that would without doubt have posed problems had they been signalled as constituting part of the debate around representations of homosexuality. Yet screenings of, for example, *Lianna*, *Coup de Foudre* and *Querelle* went undetected precisely because I consciously avoided compartmentalising them in this way.

My point is not to deny that 'difficult' or radical films can be shown but rather that such work was all too often nullified by the bureaucratic and political constraints of this Film Theatre's present management structure. Such constraints are inherent in the institutional structure itself as well as being affected by external pressures. My experience at Ipswich (I resigned in September '85) led me to an awareness of bureaucratic acquiescence in some kind of ill-defined culturalist project deemed to be only a matter of marginal interest anyway. Those responsible for determining and

⁵ My choice of titles for the season had been largely determined by the issues discussed in Simon Watney's article, 'Hollywood's Homosexual World', *Screen*, September/October 1982, vol 23 nos 3-4, pp 107-121.

68 approving the Film Theatre's programming strategy seek only to be reassured that programmes will be devised which will satisfy what they imagine to be the desire for aesthetic contemplation. In effect, their position is merely

one of support (or more often tolerance) for some kind of snobbish notion of superior entertainment capable of satisfying what they regard as a homogeneous audience.



Coup de Foudre: its homoerotic theme was non-controversial in an ordinary Ipswich Film Theatre screening.

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CENSORSHIP AT THE EDGES OF TV: 'VISIONS'

BY JOHN ELLIS

Censorship in British television is normally avoided by the twin procedures of self-censorship and referral to senior management. Occasionally, this system malfunctions, as it did with the programme *Brazil: Cinema, Sex and the Generals*, directed by Simon Hartog for the *Visions* series which I co-produce with him¹. This programme, itself concerned with censorship, was referred to senior management at Channel 4, mentioned by them in discussions with the regulatory body, the Independent Broadcasting Authority, and deemed suitable for transmission by Channel 4 after some minor changes which we agreed with them. The IBA was not party to the detailed discussions, and did not ask to see the programme in advance. However, on the day of transmission it refused to transmit the programme (June 19, 1985).

Lengthy negotiations over the summer followed the rather muted press outcry. Changes were discussed by Channel 4's controller Paul Bonner and the IBA's Claire Mulholland. As director and producer of the programme, Simon Hartog was not party to those negotiations, but was kept informed by Channel 4. When an agreed version seemed to have emerged, this was re-edited with Paul Bonner present for part of the process. However, the IBA decided on seeing this version that it was not suitable for transmission, so the programme was then withdrawn, meaning that it will probably never be transmitted in Britain.

As an outline of the process, this probably suffices. All parties now recognise that the procedures of consultation between Channel 4 and the IBA broke down in this case, through a series of minor bureaucratic fumbles and a

protracted series of misunderstood conversations. For it is remarkable that the negotiations between Paul Bonner and Claire Mulholland took place entirely without reference to a cassette of the programme. Phone conversations and letters both refer to material in the programme by verbal description only. The obvious procedure of reference to time-codes (which can specify to the frame a particular image, and can be displayed as part of a VHS cassette image) does not seem to be an aspect of normal practice in this case. No wonder misunderstandings abounded.

Despite never being broadcast, this has become the most widely discussed of the 32 *Visions* programmes that we have produced. Cassettes were shown to the press as part of the campaign we conducted to question the IBA's decision (a campaign conducted by Large Door Ltd alone, without Channel 4 support). Independent cinemas in various parts of the country have also shown and discussed it; as did audiences at the Venice, Rio de Janeiro and Amiens festivals to which it was invited. Extensive press coverage was also generated when it was shown as part of the *Rue du Cinéma* series on Canal Plus in France.

The programme has met with a mixed response, though a universal reaction has been disbelief at the IBA's decision to ban the programme. Responses have centred upon the programme's strategy in detailing its central thesis. It spends half its 40 minute length in detailing two aspects of Brazilian society: the centrality of sexuality as a means of self-expression, no doubt a result of the rigid repression of political discourse under the fifteen year military dictatorship. For film-making, this meant that much of the energy and

¹ See John Ellis, 'Channel 4 - Working Notes', *Screen* November/December 1983, vol 24 no 6, pp 37-51.

inventiveness of *cinema novo* had to be channelled away from overt political statements since the generals' censorship specifically forbade any such speech (even, ironically, material broadly in sympathy with the aims of the regime). So several film-makers discovered the genre of *pornochanchada* (akin to *Carry On* films in a Brazilian idiom), and began to exploit their rather nihilistic and sex-obsessed conventions as a vehicle for political statements. Since this period, hard-core pornography has invaded Brazilian cinemas, and the genre has died. But several film-makers have used their experience to fashion distinctive styles of their own. The programme concentrated on three: Ana Carolina, Carlos Reichenbach and, most enigmatic of all, Carlos Alberto Prates Correia.

At the same time as the original transmission date, the National Film Theatre showed some of their films in a season devoted to Brazilian cinema since 1970, and *Framework* magazine published a special issue devoted to the same theme². The screenings at the NFT crystallised for many people their ambivalence about the films and film-making strategy outlined in the *Visions* programme. Some people – especially feminist critics – maintained that the films were merely genre work within the soft-core cinema, and did not offer any discernable critique of Brazilian society. The same criticism was levelled at the *Visions* programme itself, with some critics claiming that the film clips shown in illustration of the programme's thesis did not prove what they were intended to prove. (This criticism was voiced within a context that nevertheless deplored the IBA's intervention in the programme.) The debate found a forum in the seminar arranged by the NFT, in which the programme (by that time banned) was shown, and film-makers including Ana Carolina were on the platform.

In this debate, a vast difference in cultural understanding became evident. The Brazilians could not understand the British objections to the films – or to the programme, since it adopted a similar stance. Brazilian criticism, still in the grip of libertarian ideologies of sexuality, tends to make a sharp differentiation between 'the erotic' and 'the pornographic'. And as Brazilian film-making in general does not share



Above, a scene from *Love Word Prostitute* (directed by Carlos Reichenbach, 1981) included in *Brazil: Cinema, Sex and the Generals*.

² *Framework* 28, 'Special Issue: Brazil – Post Cinema Novo', 1985.

Hollywood's obsession with male violence, the Brazilian conception of 'the pornographic' tends to be used to describe representations of sexuality which foreground male violence towards women. As a result, portrayals of sexual activity that seem to imply an 'equality' between male and female parties (in the case of heterosexual activity), or gentleness between men, are seen as 'erotic', and therefore as socially acceptable. A critique of voyeurism, of the aggression of the look and the subordination of its object, does not seem to exist. Yet this critique is central to a prominent feminist/left analysis of pornography in the UK which rejects any distinction between 'the pornographic' and 'the erotic'. This misunderstanding was compounded by the fact that Brazilian society seems to have developed and centralised certain discourses (and practices) around sexuality as a compensation for the repression of political discourses. Perhaps this return of the repressed can also be glimpsed in the level of development of clinical psychoanalytic practice in Brazil, which far outstrips Europe's.

However, I'm not sure how successful our programme was in presenting these problems. With hindsight, I'm convinced that it takes Brazilian arguments as its own to a greater degree than perhaps a programme for a British audience really should. Instead of meeting possible objections, instead of raising arguments about voyeurism, it is content to give voice to the very eloquent proponents of the Brazilian debate, providing only a general context in which the prevalence of discourses of sexuality have in Brazil. This strategy of giving voice to people who have been excluded from British TV is one that *Visions* has been keen to follow in its programmes on non-European cinemas. And the validity of the strategy was endorsed by one of the Brazilian film-makers at the NFT debate whose impatience with criticisms from British members of the audience led to an outburst in which he accused them of having a colonial mentality, of dictating to the Third World. - However, in this case, the programme's strategy clearly did not allow the arguments from Brazil to be heard as well as they could be—even though the tactic of not over-contextualising other cultures has worked in *Visions* programmes before. The degree to which British counter-arguments have to be anticipated clearly depend on the level of difficulty that certain topics

present to our culture.

The IBA's intervention did nothing to clarify the situation, since its objections to the programme were nowhere based on a critique of voyeurism. They came from the right, from the definitions provided by the moral vigilantes of the Mary Whitehouse camp. Working under the guidelines which mention (but nowhere define) 'taste and decency', certain extracts from films were deemed unsuitable for British TV audiences, even late at night on Channel 4. When pressed by Alexander Walker³ on Channel 4's *Right to Reply* programme (June 28, 1985), the IBA's Claire Mulholland was forced to justify her actions by referring to the hypothetical viewer who tuned in casually, was not involved in the argument of the programme, but who might become 'excited' by the film clips being shown. At the same time that the *Visions* programme should have been shown, the other channel that the IBA regulates, ITV, was showing an American 'entertainment' film whose basic premise was that a sexually active woman should be punished by acts of male violence against her: a frequent theme which does not attract the IBA's censorious attention.

Behind the IBA's objection to *Visions*' film extracts lies the conception that the extracts would have been unobjectionable had they been shown within their original narrative context. The fact of their being used in quotation was objectionable in its eyes. This odd judgment goes against most understanding of the mechanics of the soft-core genre, in which it is mainly the narrative promise of sexual activity rather than its actual depiction which excites the viewer. I had assumed that the critical context within which the clips were placed would be adequate to shift attention from voyeurism to analysis. However, since the IBA officers probably saved time by using its fast-forward buttons, they may have missed this feature of the programme.

However, the final sticking point was not its desire that some sequences should be excised from the programme, since Simon Hartog took the view that it would be better to have the programme shown in a mutilated form rather than not at all. Rather, the unacceptable aspect of the IBA's attitude lay in its refusal to allow the programme to indicate where cuts had been made. The IBA would allow an announcement at

³ Film critic of the London *Standard*—a right-wing libertarian and active anti-censorship campaigner.

the start of the programme to indicate that a cut version was being screened, but it refused to allow either a verbal mention of the cuts, or a caption indicating that cuts had been made, at the points where this had happened. So much for the casual viewer just tuning in haphazardly, in whose name the censorship was carried out in the first place. The IBA even refused a form of commentary that spoke in general about 'cuts having to be made', which did not mention who made them. Its only justification for this attitude was that it would be 'confusing for the viewers'. In a programme concerned with censorship?

The whole affair has shown that the IBA's current conception of its role as regulator of television is clearly inadequate. The Authority has expended large amounts of energy on censoring a programme at the fringes of broadcasting, a programme, as officers have admitted informally, that would not have created any controversy had it been broadcast when first intended. And at the same time, no action is taken on much more mainstream, generic and repeated representations which cause considerable concern to many people. The representation of male violence and macho

behaviour is one example, the repetition of demeaning and patronising jokes about women and racial minorities is another. Yet the IBA does not conceive its role as one of regulating the general run of television; it merely tinkers with those exceptional cases that float to its attention. In these exceptional cases, as with the *Visions* programme, the subjective views of individuals within the organisation can hide behind the vague general formulations of the *Television Programme Guidelines*. Such subjectivism and imprecision would not be tolerable were the IBA to regulate the general run of programmes. A public debate would be necessary, taking the form of a continuous consultation on a wide variety of issues, the publishing of details of particular interventions, and the raising of issues of concern from pressure groups in society. It would need, in other words, a democratic form of regulation rather than the present secretive and unaccountable system. As we were not allowed to say in the programme: 'Censorship in the generals' Brazil was even more arbitrary and Kafka-esque than it is in Britain.... And since the downfall of the generals, the censorship of film and theatre has been abolished in Brazil.'

SEFT

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JUNE 7th 1986 UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

For details contact Sean Cubitt at SEFT

THE NATIONAL MEDIA EDUCATION CONFERENCE

BY MIKE CLARKE

Ever since the days of *Screen* and *Screen Education* as separate entities, the question of SEFT's relationship with formal education – specifically, with teachers in schools and colleges – has been the subject of seemingly endless debate. The National Media Education Conference, held at Bradford University in July 1985, signalled a new determination to translate lofty principles into grassroots activity.

Although the British Film Institute's National Conference, the BFI's major public means of consulting opinion amongst its 'regional' constituents, has given space to education for a number of years, it has become largely an occasion for film and video-makers and exhibitors. Those involved in formal education have never been well represented there, partly because of its scheduling during term-time, early in September. Whatever the reasons, however, this event has not provided a national forum for media educators. Thus other divisions of the BFI, notably Distribution and Funding and Development, can be seen within the Institute (and elsewhere) to be servicing a large and vocal constituency but a large part of the important work undertaken by the BFI Education Department, both nationally and regionally, seems to take place in a vacuum. By the same token, SEFT's requests to the BFI for adequate funding to support media teachers have lacked credibility without some visible sign of an unsatisfied demand in the wider constituency.

One move towards the articulation of such a demand was taken recently with the Society's launch of the *Initiatives* newsletter, a modest production intended principally to establish communications between regional Media Education Initiatives groups (MEIs) and to facilitate the exchange of information among teachers often isolated in their own schools and colleges.¹ At roughly the same time, the first

steps were taken towards the organisation of the Bradford Conference.

While gatherings of media teachers do occur, notably the BFI's annual introductory Easter School, there has been no structure through which experienced media teachers could express a collective view on the many issues facing them. Since the last attempt to bring people together, the 1981 Goldsmiths College conference, Scottish teachers had advanced considerably through the formation and activities of AMES (the Association for Media Education in Scotland). Given the range of problems also facing English and Welsh media teachers, the time was obviously ripe for an event which would involve experienced media educators in significant debates about future strategies for media studies/media education.

Planning for the event was undertaken by the SEFT Education Board (a body roughly parallel with the *Screen* Editorial Board in the structures of the Society). It was decided at an early stage that the bulk of the conference should be spent in 'sectoral' working parties (primary, secondary, further education, etc), and appropriate subgroups were delegated to organise these. In addition, in order to try to impart a sense of common purpose to the conference, introductory plenary speakers were asked to outline the key issues and attempt to establish a common basis for discussion.²

¹ The regional MEI groups were set up following the BFI Education Easter School 1984. They are an informal network of people interested in media education, principally teachers in schools and colleges: contact addresses are published in *Initiatives*.

² Reports of the seminars led by David Lusted ('Media Studies vs. Media Education') and Phil Cohen ('The New Vocationalism') to plan the Conference can be found in *Initiatives*, Issue no 1 (Issue 1 available free from SEFT, annual subscription £2.00).

76 Eventually a capacity group of 170 media teachers and workers assembled to be welcomed by SEFT chair Tana Wollen and to hear opening presentations by Valerie Walkerdine (London University Institute of Education) and David Lusted (BFI Education). Walkerdine's address discussed ways of re-thinking the process of learning in the classroom and stressed the need for teachers to examine, with their students, questions of meaning, ideology and power. Lusted's contribution explored the relationship between Media Studies and Media Education: the former being understood as a specific discipline, often with its own specialist spot in the school/college timetable, the latter an increasingly pervasive notion involving work in all areas of the curriculum. Given the embattled state of education in Britain, it was easy to see Media Education as a threat to existing, hard-won spaces for progressive work. However, Lusted argued, Media Education could also be seen as presenting an opportunity to move out of the ghetto of a minority, optional subject, and towards a larger role in the transformation of the curriculum in general.³

Following this initial session, the conference divided into its constituent groups, which, as well as those already mentioned, included groupings from continuing education and the independent film and video sector. A good sense of what constituted the burning issues for each sector is provided by the resolutions summarised below.

In the closing session of the conference, three invited speakers preceded the lengthy business of resolutions. First of these was Eddie Dick from AMES, who described the recent history of the development of media education – including the famous 16-18 'modules' – in Scotland, which many people have seen as the success story of the early 1980s. In terms of priorities for English and Welsh teachers, particularly, the central question which needed to be addressed was how to organise media teachers: how to decentralise SEFT; what its relation should be to the MEIs – and the regional network being set up by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (HMI). The development of media education in England was vital also for Scotland.

Next Cary Bazalgette from BFI Education considered the significance of the conference for primary media education. This was the first-ever policy-making media education conference with a significant presence of primary teachers and advisers. The key issue was not whether primary media education would grow and develop (it would) but how and in what directions. What model should be argued for? It was not sufficient just to posit media education as an 'enrichment', an effective way of fostering already agreed other aims, such as reading and numeracy.

In order to develop notions of the kind of media education appropriate to the primary phase, the concept of childhood itself demanded analysis, since this played an important part in determining the kinds of prescriptions offered. If children were seen as passive and vulnerable, they would be needing adult protection from the media; if as weak and incompetent, then needing principally skills (media literacy); if naive and innocent, then needing to be taught distrust of the media. If, on the other hand, media education was seen not as answering some deficiency but in more positive terms, then the examination of children themselves, and of their understanding and enjoyment of the media – which could in some ways be construed as a return to a form of child-centredness, although not necessarily a de-politicised, reactionary one – might emerge. Problems of pedagogy could not simply be set on one side: they were central to the nature of any model of primary media education. Equally relevant was an examination of the place of the concepts of power and ideology at this level, as Walkerdine had indicated at the opening of the conference. Development of a radical primary media education required fundamental rethinking of many questions but there were more possibilities here for the transformation of knowledge than in the secondary school. Primary media education need not be merely an extension downwards of secondary ideas: in fact, it had the potential to recast the agenda for secondary and college media teachers.

HMI James Learmonth, whose topic was the Department of Education and Science, the Inspectorate and media education, began by looking back to the beginning of the 1980s. Media education then was patchy and largely concentrated in the upper part of the secondary schools. The Secretary of State for Education's

³ These papers, together with accounts of the group proceedings and full versions of the resolutions summarised below, appear in *Conference Report*, available from SEFT.

initiative in 1982 (leading to the publication of *Popular TV and Schoolchildren*) had set the ball rolling for a whole series of discussions but no official DES/HMI policy towards media education had yet emerged.⁴

Invitations arising from the Report's recommendations had led to the setting-up of ten regional groups, composed principally of advisers, teacher-trainers and teachers from primary and secondary schools. These groups were activity-based (not consultative), regionally autonomous and flexible in membership. A number of tentative conclusions could be drawn from the first two meetings of all the groups. There was agreement both to the involvement of parents and the importance of primary media education, and also on the need to set up some form of media teachers' communications network and to extend the kind of research begun informally in the 1982 Report. Questions which would be pursued included the media studies/media education debate and the nature of a possible media education 5-16 curriculum; the relative priority to be given to TV and other media; the relationship between practical and analytical work; whether media education is concerned with demystification only or also with evaluation; how best to resource media education; how to relate to curriculum initiatives like CPVE and TVEI⁵; what to do about teacher training. Information had been exchanged about the pattern of possibilities for in-service education.

Learmonth stressed the fact that HMI were still very much wanting to collect evidence and ideas towards formulating policy; it was vital to keep open channels of information between SEFT, the MEIs and the HMI-initiated regional groups. The likelihood of a breakthrough on the copyright front was a further cause for optimism that prospects were good in the years to come for 'a more systematic, and a more widespread, approach to media education in the schools', drawing on lessons from other countries where appropriate.

Tana Wollen opened the final part of the proceedings with a brief address in which she affirmed SEFT's determination to see the development of the regional MEI groups and outlined plans for various events around the country, including dayschools to follow up specific issues raised at Bradford. She also

explained aspects of the present constitution of SEFT, and how to change it, but stressed that such moves were only significant if there was a general willingness to carry forward the work prioritised by the conference.

It is only possible here to give a brief, selective summary of the motions passed by conference (overwhelmingly, in every case). Each emerged from either one of the established sector groups or from other meetings set up during the conference.

- From the women-only group came demands that SEFT should set up a women's media education network with a quarterly mailing, and should also lobby appropriate bodies for women-only training in media technology.

- The primary group called upon HMI, SEFT and the BFI to give an appropriately high priority to primary media education; they also wished to see the publication of a teachers' handbook for primary media educators.

- The secondary group wanted SEFT and BFI Education to give attention to 16+ examinations, CPVE, TVEI and Media Studies 5-16, and to encourage the development of practical work and classroom research.⁶ SEFT were also asked to help with teaching materials and in-service training, and to look at the place of media studies in years 1-3 and in English and modular curricula.

- Further Education (FE) demands showed vocational and pre-vocational education as major

⁴ *Popular TV and Schoolchildren, the Report of a Group of Teachers* (London, DES, 1983) - reprinted in David Lusted and Philip Drummond (eds), *TV and Schooling*, London, BFI, 1985, itself the product of a one day conference called to discuss the Report.

⁵ CPVE stands for Certificate in Pre-Vocational Education, TVEI for Technical and Vocational Education Initiative. Both are examples of 'The New Vocationalism': the former is aimed at 16-17 year-olds, the latter at the 14-18 range. Both schemes are currently optional but their effects in schools and colleges are already widespread and likely to become even greater, although some authorities (e.g., the Inner London Education Authority) have refused to take part in TVEI, despite the inducement of its ample funding from the Manpower Services Commission. For an account of the implications of such schemes, see Roy Stafford, 'Media Studies or Manpower Services?', *Screen*, May/June 1983, vol 24 no 3, pp 74-76.

⁶ On 16+ examinations, see SEFT Working Party, 'What Every 16 Year Old Should Know about the Mass Media', in *Screen*, March/April 1983, vol 24 no 2, pp 91-95; also Mike Clarke, 'A Matter of Course: 16+', *Times Educational Supplement*, February 15, 1985.

areas of concern, with SEFT being asked particularly to involve itself with examining organisations and to set up a working party to look at vocationalism in relation to media studies. Other FE proposals were principally concerned with improving communication between media educators, and between them and official bodies.

- The independent sector composite motion recognised the common interests existing between independent media workers and teachers in formal education, and stressed that SEFT should make every effort to involve the independents and to inform educationalists about the sector and its work. Facilities, publications, events and teaching materials were all possible areas of co-operation.

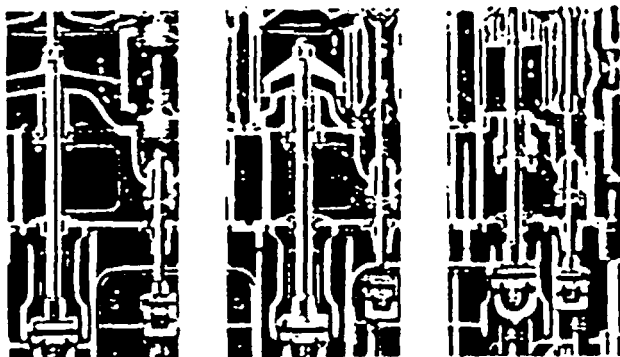
- The continuing education sector group motions were all concerned with developing SEFT and future conferences, as were two from FE. FE wanted to see future SEFT AGMs held outside London; continuing education recommended that these should be the culmination of regionally-based annual conferences. The motions urged much closer liaison between local MEI groups and SEFT, with the main body of the SEFT Education Board being made up of MEI delegates. SEFT's range of membership should be expanded and members should be organised into local MEIs, which would take turns in organising the annual conference. More detailed proposals about the content of these were also made.

Although the demands made in the earlier motions on SEFT's (and indeed BFI Education's) already stretched resources were

perhaps somewhat alarming, the range of concerns and the careful attention to the practical detail of the implementation of grand strategies evinced in the resolutions as a whole were truly impressive. There was a certain irony in the fact that, since many of those present were not members of the Society, these resolutions were not binding on SEFT, though its officers were able to give assurances that they would be taken very seriously and would be carried out wherever possible. It was scarcely surprising that there was some concern among participants that conference decisions carried only moral force. This was particularly important in relation to the last motions, some of which involved constitutional changes in SEFT itself. It was pointed out that a genuine 'regionalisation' or 'federalisation' of SEFT would have to deal with the Executive as well as the Education Board, since the former was the sovereign body between AGMs.

However, it should be clear that the conference was extremely valuable in itself, not least in bringing together teachers and independent film and video workers: participants' commitment to the development of media education was displayed in a way that could not fail to be enormously encouraging to all concerned. If media teachers were not already an effective, organised lobby, there seemed every reason to expect that they would soon become such a force. The framework developed by the conference organising group had provided a vital opportunity for media educators to consider the nature of their project in relation to recent shifts in education and in the wider culture.

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THE OTHER CINEMA— A HISTORY: PART II, 1978-1985

BY SYLVIA HARVEY

¹ Sylvia Harvey, 'The Other Cinema... A History', *Screen* November/December 1985, vol 26 no 6, pp 40-57.

The Other Cinema is a film and video distribution organisation based in London. The first part of this interview covering the period from 1970-1977 appeared in *Screen* November-December 1985.¹ The interviews in Part Two were conducted in September and October, 1985, with present and past members of the staff of the Other Cinema; those contributing and their dates as employees of the Other Cinema are: Ben Gibson (1982-present), Tony Kirkhope (1975-present), Anne Lamont (1979-1983), Paul Marris (1975-79), Bridie Thomson (1979-present).

Sylvia Harvey: *What problems did the Other Cinema (TOC) face after the closure of the Tottenham Street cinema in 1977?*

Tony Kirkhope: Lack of confidence from the film-makers, massive debts, bruised and demoralised staff. The problems were resolved by self-exploitation by the staff—low wages and long hours. It was imperative to keep the distribution library going and negotiate settlements with the various creditors TOC had inherited. When it was evident that the cinema was going to close, it was important to do it quickly and as cleanly as possible to preserve the existence of the distribution library. This strategy wasn't popular among the staff of the cinema who were about to be made redundant. I belonged to the saving the library camp.

Paul Marris: Following the closure of the cinema, when we got back to work the day after New Year's Day, 1978, we were faced with picking up the pieces: winding up the cinema, fending off any creditors' litigation in order to defend the distribution company from a knock-on liquidation, and then facing the long haul to putting the distribution side back on a secure and continued footing. You have to remember the psychological toll on those of us involved: we had worked flat out for well over two years, preparing then operating the cinema, getting it on a decent operating basis, only for the failure of the capital debts rescue operation to mean it had to shut down. It took me personally at least another two

years again to get over the demoralisation, and I drifted away in early 1979. I think credit goes particularly to Tony who, along with his colleagues, managed to conquer the problems, get all the long overdue royalties paid off, so that things were square with film-makers and producers, and put the distribution on some kind of basis to face the shock waves of the '80s – namely, the revolution for 16mm film distribution brought about by Channel Four and video, and the 'counter-revolution' for Britain launched by the Thatcher government.

How has TOC organised itself internally since 1978? Has it moved away from the collective model?

Tony Kirkhope: TOC has always practiced division of labour, with small attempts at rotation of labour which were popular both inside and outside the organisation. Given the relative importance of some jobs as opposed to others, a hierarchy of knowledge always existed, implicitly creating leaders.

Ben Gibson: I don't think TOC has moved away from the collective model on the issues that were still priorities when I joined three years ago: joint decision-making on acquisitions and equal pay. I joined TOC in 1982; before that I'd gained experience of distribution and exhibition working briefly as a cinema manager at the Paris Pullman and also through working on the magazine *Framework*.

Tony Kirkhope: TOC inherited vague ideas about collectivism from the '60s and never put them into working practice. The political/cultural objectives of the workers were served by talking about collectives; and the peer group – the independent film sector – wanted us to exist as a collective even though they were rarely collectively organised themselves. This cosy fib was a conspiracy that we lived with until the arrival of the two new members of staff: Bridie Thomson and Anne Lamont. Since then, work practices having changed, we don't call ourselves a collective.

Could you say something about the employment policy at TOC and Metro with regard to affirmative action in the employment of women and people from ethnic minorities?

Tony Kirkhope: All organisations, even very small ones like TOC and the Metro, have a responsibility to implement affirmative action policies. All posts are advertised as widely as possible, particularly in magazines and newspapers that may be read by black and Asian people. The Other Cinema currently has an equal gender balance for both full-time and part-time staff. We recognise that our choice of premises prohibits wheelchair users but the Metro Cinema has wheelchair access and it is our intention to employ people with disabilities where safety requirements will allow it. There was a disappointing response from women and people from ethnic minorities to our job adverts for the Metro

Cinema. We used our contacts to recruit a woman Projectionist and black Assistant Manager. Of our twelve part-time staff, three are from ethnic minorities and eight are women.

Could you say something about their wage structures?

Tony Kirkhope: The Other Cinema has a system of equal pay as the work is often shared and decisions about acquisitions are collectively discussed. At the Metro, where the kinds of work are very different, involving some highly specialised skills, and the commercial climate is very difficult, we operate a differential pay structure. The wages are 25 per cent higher than the industry norm.

How did Bridie and Anne come to join TOC?

Anne Lamont: My involvement with the Other Cinema started as a user. Prior to starting work there in late 1979, I had been involved in using film within various solidarity campaigns, and latterly in programming and running the Progressive Film Society (PFS). Myself and a few friends felt strongly committed to the use of film, which we felt had an immediate impact on audiences, and an immediacy that few other media have in furthering discussion and practical action for change. The films we used were mainly TOC's political documentaries and were from both the British and the international sections of the TOC catalogue. The PFS was a thriving society at the time, with audiences of up to 400, meeting every Tuesday at the University of London Union in Malet Street. Films with speakers and a well-stocked bookstall as an 'in-depth' follow-up for those interested proved to be popular, and a regular audience was built up. I applied for the job at TOC in 1979 in response to an advertisement which stressed 'a commitment to film and to socialist politics' because I felt that working there would perhaps be a way to further developing this work.

The reality of working in TOC was quite different, and these hopes slowly became overshadowed by the way in which TOC was run in those days; supposedly 'collectively', but in fact dominated by the ideas and work practices of previous workers and their conceptions of what effective political film distribution was. Bridie and myself quickly found that we had many ideas in common about this, and agreed that TOC itself had to be changed from within, and that to have a say in the running of TOC we had to get it working as a collective.

Bridie Thomson: I joined TOC in 1979 in response to an advertisement which talked about a commitment to socialist politics. Like Tony, I'm working-class although unlike him – since he went to university – I had just a basic secondary education through the early post-war grammar school system which I hated. I had been bringing up a family as a single parent since 1971. Before coming to TOC my relationship with progressive cinema was mostly through television: I still remember seeing Z

Cars and Cathy Come Home, and thinking that they were some of the first good pictures of working-class life; I also liked *Days of Hope*. Since joining TOC I've emphasised the importance of our relationship to working-class life and struggles. Providing for a middle-class left audience isn't enough; I've done some work organising screenings in conjunction with local political and community groups (including the Socialist Workers' Party and the Labour Party) on the estate where I live in Greenwich. This work is difficult and not always successful. But I think what's kept us all going at TOC over the years has been a basic political commitment.

What did you see as some of the main problems at TOC?

Bridie Thomson: TOC was never a collective, and should not have been called one. Divisions of work were clearly defined; Anne and I did the bookings, despatch, checking films and taking about 8 to 10 parcels a day down to the post office. Clearly we had no time to 'participate' even had we been asked, and any suggestions we put forward were mainly critical of the situation that we were in at TOC. After getting 'our' side of the work more efficient, and therefore leaving us more time, we tried to influence things, but were not encouraged by the other two. After we had moved to the Wardour Street office in 1980, and Anne and Charles Rubenstein decided to leave, Tony and I agreed it was more honest if we did not call ourselves a collective. Neither Anne nor I had any control over anything in TOC except our jobs.

Anne Lamont: I felt that the division of labour resulted in an unbalanced way of running TOC; since the people in daily contact with film hirers were separated from the decision-making apparatus of film acquisition and financial policy-making, both of which need to be in tune with the people on the end of the telephone line hiring the films.

Bridie Thomson: As in everything else TOC did not seem to be able to tear itself away from the trendy middle-class attitude towards film distribution. The publicity was almost non-existent, the campaign groups forming at this time had no idea of the types of films that we distributed, and it was not until the publicity person was changed that things began to start happening. New groups that were organising themselves and being funded by the GLC or by their local authority wanted to use film or video for their meetings; but we had no proper publicity to send them, only a list.

Anne Lamont: TOC was mainly responding only to those who were already informed about what films were around: in those days mainly film studies courses, some student groups, the Regional Film Theatres and a very few film societies. Publicity materials were extremely scarce – the last catalogue produced in 1975 was completely out-of-print. We felt that to get films out to groups other than those mentioned above, and to develop the distribution more effectively, publicity was an absolute

must. The labour movement distribution, for example, was minimal, although our library had many films relevant to that movement – *Look Back at Grunwick's* and *Harlan County USA* to mention just two. Having been involved in outreach work with sectors which do not usually use film, I found that the major problem – as in so many other areas of political work – was lack of resources both financial and material. Access to venues, printing facilities, projection equipment and money were the basic elements which caused many enthusiastic groups either not to use films, or to use them only in a limited way. Many attempts to set up regular film groups, or to use film more extensively, foundered for lack of these resources; and financial pressures within TOC kept pushing the cost of film hire up, and often out of the reach of such groupings – a vicious circle which perpetuates the use of film in a mainly middle-class context.

Bridie Thomson: But once our publicity person changed we noticed how much more interest was generated by the leaflets and mailings. People were able to see more of what the film was about than we had been able to put in the list. Also the computer helped to make us more efficient. And when video became popular we had more people and different types of people seeing our films – different from the original audiences that were there in 1979. The library also changed in that it took on films about topics that had become important, for example, sexual harassment and violence against women. More recently, Channel Four has allowed us to distribute programmes that have been on TV, something that was not allowed by BBC or ITV. This also brings different audiences.

Can you describe some of the details of distribution work?

Bridie Thomson: Some solidarity groups were involved with TOC, for example, the El Salvador Solidarity Campaign; they showed us films made by the democratic front (FDR) in El Salvador which we decided to distribute. Their national organising was also used by TOC to help develop a distribution network. The work these groups did informed others, for example Labour Party branches, who would then use our films on whichever country or topic they were interested. Now that the publicity has improved all kinds of social groups benefit, and we use other people's mailing lists as well as keeping our own up-to-date. Groups are now much more aware of film and its significance and therefore use it.

Film distribution, as with most jobs, is basically boring, repetitive work. The films have to be checked, maintained, packaged and despatched so that the hirers can have their film in time for their screening. We have to ensure prints get to them; this is sometimes difficult because of the non-return of films by some unthinking people. Trying to get payment is another problem, being passed from one person to another, each disclaiming responsibility. One of the biggest problems is someone ringing up for a film/video to be sent immediately; it is very difficult to make

them understand we need a written confirmation. They usually want the film/video that day or the next, and get extremely cross because we have rules that must be kept. We have to have a written record of every transaction, so that we can have everything on the computer for anyone to check our records. One of the best things about film distribution is talking to the people who want to hire a film, but are not too sure which one would be best. Usually we suggest more than one, and let them view them for a small payment, so that they can choose. We have good relationships with most of the groups that hire our films irrespective of race or sex. On anti-nuke issues our films make a definite political point and are not broad-based as is the membership of CND (the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament). A lot of the CND groups still use our films as do peace and environmental ones.

What has TOC's relationship been to the women's movement?

Anne Lamont: Even though TOC was aware of the cultural needs of the women's movement, and did in fact produce a catalogue of women's films, in the early days our abilities were genuinely restricted by a lack of films available to meet that demand. Women were really only starting to break into the film production sector in the late '70s and early '80s.

Tony Kirkhope: In the early '70s the London Women's Film Group used TOC as their distributor. They were quite prolific and put out such titles as *The Amazing Equal Pay Show* (1974), the *Fakenham Film* (1972) and *Careless Love* (1976). This area of the catalogue was a political priority and we continued to acquire titles, including European features like *Take It Like a Man Ma'am*. In 1980 we published the women's movement section of the catalogue as a separate book, and since then we've been consolidating this area with films by Chantal Ackerman, Marianne Rosenbaum and things like Connie Field's *Life and Times of Rosie the Riveter* which has been a major success. We have also, over the years, been committed to developing the gay section of the catalogue. The women's movement grew into a sizeable segment of the market, and other distributors began buying women's films. Within this flourishing area a new women's distribution organisation: Cinema of Women (COW) was founded and provides an excellent library of films.

Ben Gibson: COW's business strategy is broadly similar to ours, in that they seek to pay for a larger, less popular, non-theatrical library via cinema features for the art circuit made by and for women. So we have been in competition for some of this product.

Tony Kirkhope: Initially, the relationship between us was very strained, with COW claiming as a natural right the distribution rights over any film they wished to have; we defended our role and took on films that people wanted us to distribute. It was very difficult to come to terms around certain titles which we all hoped to distribute; *Born in Flames*

would be the major example here, where the film-maker originally signed with us, but then decided that COW would be more appropriate as distributor; we released her from her contract and the film was passed on to COW.

Anne Lamont: Groups like COW and Circles emerged from a period of expansion in the development of the women's movement during the '70s which had created a need for women to make their own films, and in turn to have them distributed by women-only distributors. TOC as a mixed-sex distribution outfit could not respond to this demand, and this gap was filled by the specialist women's distributors.

What has been your relationship to the black movement and the development of black film-making?

Tony Kirkhope: One of our fundamental ties was with black film-making from the Third World: films like those of Ousmane Sembène. Also, when *Blacks Britannica* came along, having been banned on American television after pressure from the British government, TOC took this film on. With the emergence of indigenous black film-making in Britain, it was natural for us to act as distributor of films like Menelik Shabazz's *Step Forward Youth*, Imruh Caesar's *Riots and Rumours of Riots* and Isaac Julien's *Who Killed Colin Roach?* Most recently we took Colin Prescod's films for the Race and Class group: *Struggles for Black Community*.

Ben Gibson: One of the major ambitions of the new Metro cinema is to give theatrical exposure to this growing area of production, as black workshops like Sankofa, Retake and the Black Audio-Film Collective get to the point of making features. As with COW and Circles who handle their particular areas with great skill, we welcome the idea currently being tabled for a black and Third World film distribution agency, which would quite definitely help to promote and propagandise for black, Asian and Third World film-making.

How do you see your relationship to the peace movement?

Tony Kirkhope: Our initial approach to the anti-nuke movement was to support the trade union movement's line that nuclear-powered electricity production was okay, tempered with some environmentalism; workers' safety was the paramount issue.

Ben Gibson: Our current list includes a number of films on the peace movement, with a slightly different angle from the Concord catalogue. We select films that are more about the politics of disarmament, and try to avoid anything that reproduces liberal defeatism. So, for example, a film like Joan Harvey's *America From Hitler to MX*, which we distribute, argues clearly that the power to disarm or not rests more with the

In what ways has TOC been affected by political and cultural changes since 1979?

Ben Gibson: As a distributor of left counter-information or counter-culture TOC relies completely for its output on the state of those cultures and the availability of finance for producers within those cultures. There have been major changes. Now, for example, there are fewer organisations like progressive film societies which had been constituted in local areas and colleges in the image of the Other Cinema—existing in order to show a broad range of independent/radical film-making. So, individual areas in the catalogue have reverted more to individual interest groups and campaign-based groups. This has in turn meant an increased concentration on developing the mailing list in certain areas like the trades union movement, teachers' centres dealing in multi-cultural education and peace studies, libraries and so on. We're looking less for the narrow 'political' audience that TOC seems to have addressed in the '70s. This also ties in with the major change of the last five-year period: a move away from 16mm and towards video for the non-theatrical audience. You need about three times as many hirings to generate the same revenue on a video if you're hiring it out (typically, for group use the video hire charge is only £10 with £5 of that going to the producer as opposed to £40 for 16mm feature). Conversely, we're selling videos with higher returns (about what 16mm used to generate) and the overheads associated with 16mm don't apply when you're doing a film on video only.

In general our increased turnover necessitates TOC going out into areas like education in a much bigger way, and grouping films by subject in leaflets, so that the 'library' idea comes to the forefront. On video we might acquire a title partly in order to 'fill in' a missing area in the library. That idea has probably been around for a while, but not so central to our work as now. We have taken on Channel Four generated product like the *Eleventh Hour's* 'Africa' film repertory series partly to get a stake in more mainstream markets for video. But this change in tone, reflecting partly the fact that the independent producers of the '70s are increasingly, in the '80s, using Channel Four to finance their work, doesn't imply for us any kind of political compromise. No area of the library, as it's been sub-divided for some time—from women's movement to labour movement to gay liberation or anti-racism—has been in any way made less relevant by subsequent events. Looking for a broader, less self-selected audience for the films has meant a change in the style of the publicity. I think current leaflets indulge less in utopian rhetoric, and also tend less to make the consumer feel under-informed, inadequate or uninvolved. The complete catalogue is due to be republished soon, and there's no loss of our commitment to full documentation for the films. However, the annual film lists have taken on an increasingly important role, making a short description of all the films in the library accessible free to a readership of nine to ten thousand every year. With relatively

short-life issues like the anti-privatisation campaigns of the trade union movement, or documentation of the miners' strike, this system allows the catalogue to alter more rapidly. Also generic leaflets go some way to dealing with the problem of the sheer number of titles we're handling, something over 450 at present.

What has been the impact of technological and economic changes?

Tony Kirkhope: The institutional use of video has profound implications for 16mm distributors. In two or three years' time, 16mm will be used only by film societies and specialist film courses. Unless a title has a life as a campaign film, or if it's for film society use, we now normally avoid the expense of buying a print. Some of our titles are now available on 35mm and video only, for example, *Toute une Nuit* (Ackerman) or *The Patriot* (Kluge). From an educational point of view, video distribution is easier, cheaper and in many ways more beneficial for the consumer. The received image quality is poorer, but this has to be weighed against the large cuts in education budgets, and the desire that many teachers have to show more audio-visual material in their classes. 16mm distribution is extremely expensive; we'll have one or two prints, where major film libraries of popular titles might have 40 or 50 copies, so our print-purchase costs are relatively much higher and we have to pass on these costs to the consumers who are often in the most squeezed areas of consumption—that is, in education. The only way to break through the spiralling costs, for us and for the users, is through video. So we now have some 40 to 50% of our titles available on video, and the rental cost is much lower than for 16mm film.

And we have been affected by other technological changes also: film distribution includes a lot of boring and repetitive tasks that can easily be done by computers. Since the introduction of computerisation and the development of our own computer programme, we have been able to spend the time we used to devote to invoicing, organising royalties on ledgers and such jobs, on much more useful areas like promotion, developing the mailing list, acquisitions. In that sense the computer has revolutionised our work practice.

How has the development of Channel Four television affected TOC?

Ben Gibson: Channel Four's challenging film acquisitions policy has been a great help to us and other distributors in the sector. If our films are bought by them, they are seen by more people, and we can use our TV sale percentages as guarantees against total loss on more difficult releases like Ackerman or Godard. Our main output has been via the *Eleventh Hour* slot; and we have now sold some 20 to 30 of our back catalogue titles to the Channel. However, they've started to buy films cheaper by cutting out the UK distributor from the deal. This means that there's a large amount of material that they are acquiring directly and that it's therefore impossible for us to acquire.

Tony Kirkhope: It's natural that the focus of attention for independent producers in the UK should be the Channel. But very little of the material made by them has either a theatrical or non-theatrical release when it's financed by the Channel. Of course many producers are not interested in a specifically cinema or video release for their work outside of broadcasting. Still, it has also happened that the Channel has produced things like the IBT (International Broadcasting Trust) series on development politics and the Race and Class films which we have been able to acquire and which have been useful and important additions to our non-theatrical library on video.

To what extent has TOC been rooted in what might be called 'middle-class radicalism'? And what are the implications of this?

Tony Kirkhope: The entire independent sector is middle-class and has very little to do with the working-class. But we have links with the labour movement. Middle-class film-makers have tended to play out their political fantasies via agencies such as ourselves, and the term 'middle-class radicalism' indicates this kind of process which remains a major problem for the left. We've concentrated on direct issues like anti-imperialism (including Ireland), anti-racism, the women's movement, gay rights. But the materials we distribute on these issues aren't pluralistic, liberal material. They're films seeking a political analysis which locates these battles as part of one struggle.

Ben Gibson: I think we've progressed politically since the '70s, in that now we are not trying to avoid a recognition of our actual class position.

How has TOC served the needs of the labour movement?

Tony Kirkhope: We're an access library—we're not out there on the streets. But we do supply trades unions and local trades councils with a range of materials from health and safety at work for shop stewards' courses, to films on new technology, as well as the expanding area of trades union internationalism with recent materials like *Bitter Cane* and *The Real Thing*.

Ben Gibson: Our publicity doesn't divide off the labour movement from other, broader struggles. A recent leaflet for trade unionists has sections on areas like 'Ireland', 'the Media' and 'Anti-Racism'.

Paul Marris: When I arrived at TOC in 1975, I was struck by the lack of any address towards the labour movement—in terms of material acquired for distribution, or consequently in the audience implicit in any strands of the publicity put out. This may partly have been a matter of production: distributors can only handle what's available, and there wasn't much suitable material available, particularly if you're thinking of the labour movement in Britain, where indigenous material about

indigenous issues has to be the starting point, in my analysis. But British film-makers didn't seem to be thinking that way in the early '70s, with the honourable exceptions of the Freeprop grouping, and of Cinema Action, who interestingly developed their own distribution for their own production, seeing the two processes interpenetrated at every stage. At TOC a handful of working-class organisations were occasionally interested in Nick Broomfield's documentary about the rent strike in Kirkby, Merseyside, against the Housing Finance Act of the previous Government (*Behind the Rent Strike*, 1974); but that was about it.

This situation may well have arisen because of the ideological components of the counter-culture from which TOC sprang, where the more politicised element looked to the New Left, which was rooted amongst the intellectuals, found its 'mass' base in the student movement, and took Vietnam as the issue. The justified attacks on the Wilson Government, and its imperialist position over Vietnam, had a tendency to extend into a general reflex of writing off the official labour movement altogether, and more importantly its mass membership. Lenin's theory of the labour aristocracy was perverted to argue that the only site of possible socialist transformation was regarded as the colonial and neo-colonial world, and empirical evidence of this seemed to be provided by the white working-class manifestations against the anti-war movement in the States. The stress on Latin American material within the TOC library was partly a result of this *zeitgeist* among the young intellectuals.

Developments within the milieu descended from the New Left changed this. Faced with a right-wing Labour Government once again, the challenge was taken up in film-making, albeit with pitifully small resources. Perhaps the most remarkable experiment was that of the Newsreel Collective, who were influenced by a political current of the time called Big Flame. The founder members of Newsreel, who included Nick Hart-Williams from TOC, and the late Pascoe McFarlane, received what was then a substantial grant from the BFI Production Board, to produce a programme of short films, ten per year over a year, on topical issues.

Newsreel produced a string of films aimed at labour movement organisations amongst others, on topics such as housing, unemployment, anti-racism, abortion rights. They were distributed by Newsreel itself in conjunction with TOC, and these began to circulate partly within the labour movement, to bodies such as trades councils or conferences, rather than branch meetings themselves. But the project was too ambitious: either a topic was explored in depth—such as the dual power situation in Portugal in 1976—and took many months to make, or it was covered with due speed and insufficient depth, like the housing film. In retrospect, 16mm film was probably the wrong medium.

Video has come to seem far more appropriate. Unfortunately, in industry, management-orientated material was quicker off the mark: the well-known Michael Peacock/John Cleese Video Arts series of management-training tapes, or the insidious Merseyside Port Authority initiative to sell voluntary redundancy schemes through well-targeted video-

tapes. For labour movement work, video suits the producer more than film: it's cheaper to shoot and less cumbersome to edit. And it suits the user better: it's cheaper to hire, lighter to transport, far easier to show. The magnificent Miners' Campaign tapes have become the classic of this kind of video use in the labour movement in the '80s so far. Interestingly, this initiative was foreshadowed on a much smaller scale by the 16mm film work around the Grunwick's dispute carried out by Newsreel, Chris Thomas and TOC in the late seventies.

Besides immediate campaign work for solidarity purposes during a dispute, there are predominantly two other kinds of material. Firstly, labour history documentaries, drawing on oral reminiscence and archive footage, a genre which North America independent film-makers have so far made their own. TOC has been distributing several examples from the genre over the last few years: *With Babies and Banners*, *The Wobblies*, *Union Maids*, *For Twenty Cents a Day*, *Rosie The Riveter*. Sheffield Film Co-op's *Red Skirts on Clydeside* builds on this American achievement in the British context, and I'd like to see the production and use of such indigenous material take off here.

Secondly, there's education material, for shop stewards' training and branch discussion. *New Technology—Whose Progress?*, which TOC distributes, is one of the best examples I know. Increasingly labour movement bodies are commissioning such material: the Union of Communication Workers has had tapes made by Smith Bundy Video, NALGO (the National Association of Local Government Officers) by Birmingham Film Workshop/Trade Union Resource Centre (TURC), and so on. At the GLC (the Greater London Council) we've been regularly commissioning videos for use in the labour movement, and other working-class and campaigning organisations. For example, the Transport Committee commissioned a tape by Triple Vision against one-person operated bussing; the Public Services Committee a film on the hazards of transporting nuclear waste; Industry and Employment Committee, tapes on the multi-nationals, on coal-powered energy generation, on job creation schemes, etc. The Police Committee has commissioned material from Film Work Group, Parallax Pictures, Sankofa, Oedipus Productions, and others.

To some extent, distribution of material of this kind is carried out by the commissioning body, the trade union or local authority or whatever. In addition, many producers are following Cinema Action's early example, and organising their own distribution and even screenings; or selling copies of the video cassette direct to the user body. Examples are Birmingham TURC, Leeds Animation Workshop, Sheffield Film Co-op, Trade Films, Platform Films, Albany Video and Team Video. In the future, the Other Cinema library will increasingly become one source amongst many for any given labour movement video, unlike the 'exclusive rights' situation which tended to prevail in 16mm film hire, with its comparatively expensive copy costs.

Overall in my view, the switch to video means we are on the threshold of a new burgeoning era for the circulation of audiovisual material in and

by the labour movement.

How has your profile in the industry changed since the '70s.

Ben Gibson: In 1984 our turnover was £219,000. £26,000 was GLC support for a wage for promotional activities. Of our total, non-theatrical video hire and sales on 16mm and video accounted for £102,000; theatrical hire accounted for £12,000. Television sales accounted for £70,000. The non-theatrical part breaks down into approximately £68,000 on 16mm hire; £20,000 on video hire and the remaining £14,000 on video sales. Revenue after payment of royalties on video sale and hire (royalties are set at 50% across the board and 25% on television sales) was £12,000. This figure was generated on the sale and hire of 121 titles. We hire videos at a cost (excluding postage etc) of £10, and sell them at approximately £40 to £50.

Two conclusions follow from this: firstly, that without television sales we could be in trouble; secondly, that video distribution is not yet a major area of revenue.

Can you outline in more detail some of the ways in which the advent of video has affected TOC economically?

Tony Kirkhope: Video has made it increasingly cheap and simple for community-based organisations to use our films. But there are financial dangers here for us. Over the last two years we have invested a great deal of time and revenue, concomitant with the running down of the 16mm non-theatrical market, on developing schemes to heighten the profile of video as a resource for our traditional customers, as well as for newer areas (for us) like schools, libraries and teachers' centres. We estimate that in another two years we may have doubled our revenue on video hire, and perhaps tripled video sales. This in turn will be accompanied by a drop in 16mm hire. Thus, by 1987 we should make at least £41,000 on sale and hire of independent video. Assuming these figures are correct, we should make a contribution to the revenues of the independent video producers of the other £41,000 of the total £82,000 turnover – barely enough to make a low-budget TV documentary. And our £41,000 revenue would compare with a (current) annual office overhead of £60,000.

One conclusion from this is that any agency seeking to generate revenue from video distribution in the independent sector within similar constraints must be subsidised. It also seems that independent distributors like TOC have missed an opportunity to sell product abroad, in particular to television in Europe, and ceded the ground and the revenue to agents without political projects like Jane Balfour Films.

Bridie Thomson: Subsidy is fine if everyone is subsidised. If only one independent distribution organisation is subsidised it has an unfair advantage. This can only lead to another outlet for 'political' films having to close.

What has your relationship been like recently with the national and local state?

Tony Kirkhope: We have a good relationship with the distribution division of the British Film Institute. They have a scheme to support the bringing of films into distribution on the basis of an advance against receipts at the Regional Film Theatres. Over the years they have helped us with a number of titles, including Ackerman and Godard. In this way the BFI steer us into mutually agreed acquisitions which service their cultural needs. They've not given us any direct revenue support since 1974.

Ben Gibson: Since the intervention of the Greater London Council film policy group in our area of work we've received a lot of support from the GLC. They have been much more interventionist politically than any cultural bodies, and areas that they've singled out as important have been those that we've been working around for a long time: the women's movement, anti-racism, gay rights and the peace movement.

Could you outline the development of GLC arts policy, and indicate the ways in which it has supported TOC in particular?

Paul Marris: I became Film Officer at the GLC early in 1984. The Livingstone administration at the GLC came in in 1981, and under Tony Banks as head of the Arts and Recreation Committee set about elaborating a progressive arts policy for London, acknowledging the new mechanically and electronically reproductive arts as particularly important for contemporary progressive cultural practice. So film and video have been given quite a high place on the cultural agenda of the arts policies developed at the GLC. It took some months to begin to develop and implement these new policies; and it was only in late '82 and early '83 that the policies really began to take effect in terms of grants made to arts organisations in London. In 1981-82, before Banks got his policy in gear, out of arts grants of £4 million at the GLC, only £30,000 was spent on film and video, of which £23,000 by tradition went to the BFI for the London Film Festival. By 1984-85, the GLC was spending £16 million on arts grants, which included £1½ million on support for film and video. This growing element was the result of conscious thinking within the Council that a progressive policy for public support for the arts must extend not only to the traditional areas of ballet, opera, galleries, classical theatre and musical performances, nor yet simply to contemporary progressive genres within the same forms—say fringe theatre or black music—but must also come to address the mass reproductive forms of the modern age: photography, publishing, musical recording and film and video. Some of the preliminary thinking on this is interestingly set down in the Council's recently published *London Industrial Strategy*, in the chapter on the Cultural Industries. As so often, this theory, and the practice of subsidy, have not yet caught up with one another, and it is

another casualty of the GLC's abolition that now they never will, at least as far as the Council is concerned.

However, it's been the case for several years now that the arts committees of the Council have recognised the need to intervene financially in the area of film and video, and not only in exhibition and distribution but also in production—with support for a progressive sector that includes previously existing franchised workshops in London, video access workshops for particular social and geographical communities, and backing for the development of a set of black franchised workshops.

In addition the Arts and Recreation Committee acknowledged the Other Cinema as a significant resource for Londoners, as well as nationally for progressive film and video distribution, and made its first grant to TOC of £13,500 for distribution work, early in 1984. This was followed with grants of £29,500 (1984-85) and £33,600 (1985-86). The Council has also been supporting the women's distribution groups Cinema of Women and Circles, and the distribution work of the London Film-makers' Co-op. The Arts and Recreation Committee also recognised that for the long-term viability of TOC as a distribution operation, and also for the full benefits of GLC funding to other film and video production groups to accrue to Londoners, the policy required as its centre-piece a central London cinema, where the material that was being produced by young, British independent film-makers, particularly by women and ethnic minority film-makers, could be screened, in addition to Third World and other overseas material. This would contribute to greater exposure for the work of those film-makers, set TOC itself on a more solid footing on its distribution side, and was also likely to reach those cultural and political activists who would be able to set up screenings and use the material distributed by TOC in the boroughs at local community and grass-roots level. Consequently, what was proposed was a two-screen venue in the West End, with video projection available as well. It was from this that the Other Cinema was given a grant of £12,000 to commission a feasibility study into a particular site; and out of this has grown the Metro Cinema, which the Council has subsequently granted £360,000 worth of capital money. The Cinema was opened by Tony Banks, now chair of the whole Council, on October 11, 1985. (Its first bill was Jean-Luc Godard's *Hail Mary*.)

How would you characterise TOC's objectives in the mid-'80s?

Ben Gibson: The Metro project is very important to the Other Cinema and will change the direction of its activities over the next few years. Two and a half years ago we made an application to the GLC for what was then to be a 'media centre', housing offices in the way our present office building does, for many independent sector film groups. It was also to have two cinemas, which would allow us to establish a high profile for independent cinema in the West End. The West End part was important, because if we could give these films a profile in the London entertainments scene, alongside commercial product and fashionable art product, this would allow such a cinema to support itself with bums on

seats, and avoid spending all its time looking for shrinking revenue grant-aid. The GLC film policy group had already recommended that the Council fund a 'high visibility showcase for progressive work', because they saw that such a showcase, by feeding other independent cinemas around London, could greatly increase the total audience for the films, establishing—in time—a sort of circuit. Also, although we couldn't reasonably expect that working-class Londoners would form the majority of the Metro's audience, by working within the entertainment zone it stood a better chance of attracting such an audience.

Tony Kirkhope: The Metro will allow us to buy more product, although we don't anticipate providing even half of it as a distributor, partly because it's a separate entity from TOC, and partly simply because we wouldn't be big enough to buy that much stuff. Cinema One and Cinema Two should be as confused as possible in the audiences' minds, so that there's no distinction between entertainment and worthiness. We've made Cinema Two equally luxurious, and at some times we'll be paying the rent in there with profitable arts circuit 'sleepers', and taking a few risks in Cinema One. This is an important ideological requirement because it draws one audience, who might already go and see Godard at the Camden Plaza, into, for example, 'new films from Central America' on Saturday afternoon, or the Chinese Film Society, or a British independent feature leading some kind of short season in Cinema Two.

Ben Gibson: Our relationship with Channel Four will, we hope, develop as we offer a theatrical window for some of their product, in particular the films being funded by their independent film department. Specialist seasons will be programmed (for example, around the theme of Third World music), eventually by an outreach programmer. In this way Metro Pictures will begin to provide cinema expertise and basic programming knowledge, so that a group like, for example, the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, can work with the programmer to develop a season, but controlling their own presentation and selection of films.

Tony Kirkhope: Naturally the development of the Metro feeds into TOC's non-theatrical activities, both because we can show theatrically some shorts and documentaries which otherwise wouldn't get seen in a cinema, and because bigger films, like *Hail Mary* or *Before Stonewall*, will have a high profile through the Cinema and provide revenue on 16mm and video.

Ben Gibson: Some of the realities of TOC's selling environment—from the tendency of other distributors to identify profitable independent areas and directors and hive them off, and the lack of money to hire films and videos amongst the traditional users of our stuff—are very harsh at present.

Tony Kirkhope: But the Metro will take us through the next few years in a newer, stronger position in which we're more 'cinema' and less 'other', without losing any of our overall project as activists or distributors. 'The Other Cinema' was always a terrible name anyway; people like us scrape a living on the margins of the cinema, but there is no other.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

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